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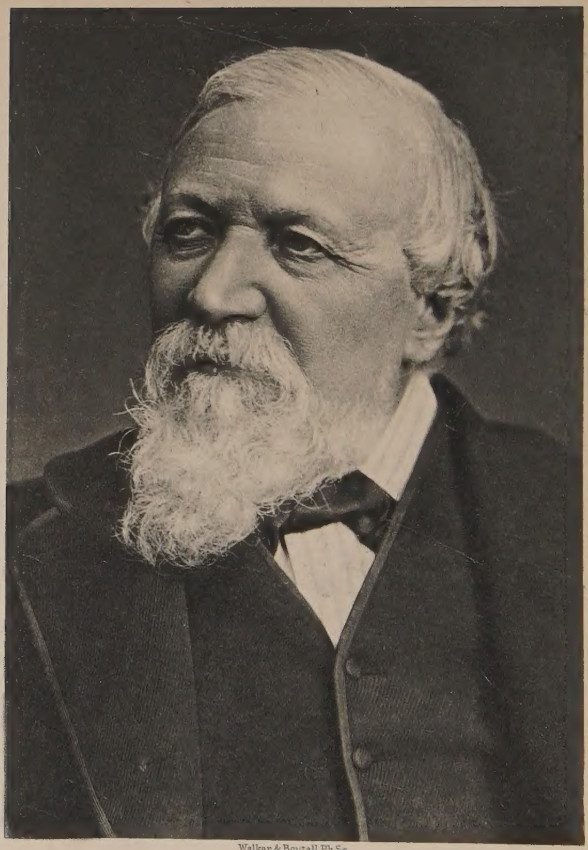

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Robert Browning.

1881.

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THE
POETICAL WORKS
OF
ROBERT BROWNING

WITH PORTRAITS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II

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PORTRAIT OF ROBERT BROWNING (1881) . . . *Frontispiece.*

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

1868–9.

["The Ring and the Book" appeared at the end of 1868, after a four years' silence since the publication of "Dramatis Personæ." It was issued in four volumes, which were published singly, the first in November 1868, the others between that date and February 1869. The composition of it had occupied the poet for more than three years since the "memorable day" in June 1862, when he picked up, at a stall in the Piazza San Lorenzo in Florence, the "square old yellow book" with the "crumpled vellum covers," containing the record of the murder, by Count Guido Franceschini, of Pompilia his wife and her reputed parents, Pietro and Violante Comparini, in January 1698. The story of the genesis of the poem is told in the first book, which also gives an outline of the whole work. Putting aside the first and last books, which serve as prologue and epilogue, it consists of ten dramatic monologues, in each of which the story of the murder, and of the events and motives which led up to it, is told from a different point of view. Books II. and III. reproduce the gossip of Rome, first on the side favourable to Guido, and next on that hostile to him—in both cases incomplete and inaccurate, but serving to introduce the reader to the general facts of the case. Book IV. gives the conversation of aristocratic society, indifferent, cynical, excusing and condemning both parties. The next three books rise to a higher level, alike of poetry and dramatic interest. The principals are brought upon the stage. In Book V., Count Guido makes his defence before his judges; in Book VI., Giuseppe Caponsacchi, the priest whom Guido charges with being Pompilia's lover, shrivels the accuser's sophistries with his indignant eloquence; in Book VII., Pompilia, dying in the hospital, tells her story in all simplicity and forgivingness. Books VIII. and IX. are devoted to the speeches of counsel on either side, whose sole object is to display their own ingenuity, without much regard to what their clients may have said; and, being full of law Latin and classical allusions, may be scarcely intelligible to some readers, and can be omitted without much loss. Book X., on the other hand, is the fine soliloquy of the Pope, to whom, in the last resort, Guido makes appeal; while Book XI. shows Guido in his prison, the night before his execution, defiantly haranguing the two ecclesiastics who have been sent to administer to him the consolations of religion.

Throughout the poem Browning adheres closely to the facts as narrated in the book which first suggested the theme, and in a contemporary pamphlet, which he obtained shortly afterwards in London, giving a consecutive narrative of the murder and the execution. The meaning of the title is explained in the first lines of the poem.]

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

I.—THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?
'Tis Rome-work, made to match
(By Castellani's imitative craft)
Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
After a dropping April; found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There's one trick,
(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
As this was,—such mere oozings from the mine,
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow,—
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap:
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear.

That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
Effects a manageable mass, then works:
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there's repristination![1] Just a spirt
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume;
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,
The rondure brave, the lilied loveliness,
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore:
Prime nature with an added artistry—
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring.
What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers,—pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,
Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,
Toward Baccio's marble,[2]—ay, the basement-ledge
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
'Twixt palace and church,—Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.
This book,—precisely on that palace-step
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
Now serves re-venders to display their ware,—
'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
Treading the chill scagliola[3] bedward: then
A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie*[4] each,
Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
—Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
Master, the imaginative Sienese[5]
Great in the scenic backgrounds—(name and fame
None of you know, nor does he fare the worse:)
From these . . . Oh, with a Lionard going cheap
If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde[6]
Whereof a copy contents the Louvre!—these
I picked this book from. Five compeers in flank
Stood left and right of it as tempting more—
A dogseared Spicilegium, the fond tale
O' the Frail One of the Flower,[7] by young Dumas,
Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life,—

[1] *Repristination:* restoration to its earlier nature.

[2] *Baccio's marble:* the statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere (father of Cosimo de' Medici), by Baccio Bandinelli, in the Piazza San Lorenzo, between the Palazzo Riccardi (the palace of the Medici) and the church of San Lorenzo.

[3] *Scagliola:* marble or stone flooring.

[4] *Two crazie:* about 1½d.

[5] *The imaginative Sienese:* Ademollo (see l. 369).

[6] *Joconde:* the portrait of Mona Lisa Gioconda, by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Louvre.

[7] *The Frail One of the Flower:* La Dame aux Camélias.

With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And "Stall!" cried I: a *lira* made it mine.

Here it is, this I toss and take again;
Small-quarto size, part print part manuscript:
A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.
Give it me back! The thing's restorative
I' the touch and sight.

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends:
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh. And on I read
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes
And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine:
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape,
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear,—
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun:
None of them took my eye from off my prize.
Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge;
Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest.
"*Romana Homicidiorum*"—nay,
Better translate—"A Roman murder-case:
"Position of the entire criminal cause
"Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
"With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
"Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
"By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
"At Rome on February Twenty Two,
"Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight:
"Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
"Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
"The customary forfeit."

Word for word,
So ran the title-page: murder, or else
Legitimate punishment of the other crime,
Accounted murder by mistake,—just that
And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
When the law had her eloquence to launch,
But interfilleted with Italian streaks
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue,—
That, was this old square yellow book about.

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five; real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge,—the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it;
Seeing, there properly was no judgment-bar,
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts.

There was a Hall of Justice; that came last:
For Justice had a chamber by the hall
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
Then sent accuser and accused alike,
In person of the advocate of each,
To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
The battle. 'Twas the so-styled Fisc[1] began,
Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print
The printed voice of him lives now as then)
The public Prosecutor—"Murder's proved;
"With five . . . what we call qualities of bad,
"Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet;
"Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
"That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
"Count Guido Franceschini: punish him!"
Thus was the paper put before the court
In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,)
To study at ease. In due time like reply
Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
Official mouthpiece of the five accused
Too poor to fee a better,—Guido's luck
Or else his fellows',—which, I hardly know,—
An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
A passion of betrayed simplicity:
"Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint
"O' the colour of a crime, inform us first!
"Reward him rather! Recognize, we say,
"In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt!
"All conscience and all courage,—there's our Count
"Charactered in a word; and, what's more strange,
"He had companionship in privilege,
"Found four courageous conscientious friends:
"Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
"Sustainers of society!—perchance
"A trifle over-hasty with the hand
"To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else;
"But that's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
"Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so!"
Thus paper second followed paper first,
Thus did the two join issue—nay, the four,
Each pleader having an adjunct. "True, he killed
"—So to speak—in a certain sort—his wife,
"But laudably, since thus it happed!" quoth one:
Whereat, more witness and the case postponed.
"Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
"And proved himself thereby portentousest
"Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
"As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
"Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match:
Again, more witness, and the case postponed.
"A miracle, ay—of lust and impudence;
"Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first:
"—Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer.
"Beside, the precedents, the authorities!"
From both at once a cry with an echo, that!
That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
Unleashed in a cornfield: soon spread flare enough,
As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
From earth's four corners, all authority
And precedent for putting wives to death,
Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem.
How legislated, now, in this respect,
Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code
Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!
Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!
The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
Cornelia de Sicariis[2] hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis; Julia de
Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that;
King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul:
That nice decision of Dolabella, eh?
That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!
Down to that choice example Ælian[3] gives
(An instance I find much insisted on)
Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
Yet understood and punished on the spot
His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend;

[1] *Fisc: i.e.*, Counsel for the Treasury, or Public Prosecutor.

[2] *Cornelia de Sicariis, Pompeia de Parricidiis:* the titles of Roman laws dealing with homicide.

[3] *Ælian:* De Animalium Natura, xi. 15.

A true tale which has edified each child,
Much more shall flourish favoured by our court!
Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
And always—once again the case postponed.

Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
—Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
More noise by word of mouth than you hear now—
Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause.
"Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce
"Count Guido devilish and damnable:
"His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,
"Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:
"As for the Four who helped the One, all Five—
"Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
"In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?
"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?
"Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
"Priest and to spare!"—this was a shot reserved;
I learn this from epistles which begin
Here where the print ends,—see the pen and ink
Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch!—
"My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
"Has taken minor orders many enough,
"Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
"To neutralize a blood-stain: *presbyter*,[1]
"*Primæ tonsuræ*, *subdiaconus*,
"*Sacerdos*, so he slips from underneath

[1] *Presbyter*, &c.: the names of orders in the Roman Church, of which the minor ones can be assumed without causing the holder to cease to be a layman; thus (a point of importance in Count Guido's case) they do not prevent him from marrying, yet they are sufficient to entitle him to appeal to the Pope, as head of the Church.

"Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
"Of mother Church: to her we make appeal
"By the Pope, the Church's head!"

A parlous plea,
Put in with noticeable effect, it seems;
"Since straight,"—resumes the zealous orator,
Making a friend acquainted with the facts,—
"Once the word 'clericality' let fall,
"Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn
"By all considerate and responsible Rome."
Quality took the decent part, of course;
Held by the husband, who was noble too:
Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
With too-refined susceptibility,
And honour which, tender in the extreme,
Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
At all risks, not sit still and whine for law
As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto. Nay, it seems,
Even the Emperor's Envoy had his say
To say on the subject; might not see, unmoved,
Civility menaced throughout Christendom
By too harsh measure dealt her champion here.
Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind,
From his youth up, reluctant to take life,
If mercy might be just and yet show grace;
Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
To take a life the general sense bade spare.
'Twas plain that Guido would go scatheless yet.

But human promise, oh, how short of shine!
How topple down the piles of hope we rear!
How history proves . . . nay, read Herodotus![2]
Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
Cried the Pope's[3] great self,—Innocent by name

[2] *Herodotus: e.g.*, the stories of Crœsus or of Xerxes.

[3] *The Pope:* Innocent XII., pope 1691–1700.

And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God,—
'Twas he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,[1]
('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,
Tickling men's ears—the sect for a quarter of an hour
I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling-while,
Taste some vituperation, bite away,
Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)
"Leave them alone," bade he, "those Molinists!
"Who may have other light than we perceive,
"Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"
Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
Of Nepotism; and so observed the poor
That men would merrily say, "Halt, deaf and blind,
"Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
"To gather up the fragments of his feast,
"These be the nephews of Pope Innocent!—
"His own meal costs but five carlines[2] a day,
"Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more."
—He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
When they appealed in last resort to him,
"I have mastered the whole matter: I nothing doubt.
"Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
"Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one,—
"And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
"To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
"Instead of touching us by finger-tip
"As you assert, and pressing up so close
"Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe,—
"I and Christ would renounce all right in him.
"Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
"And busied how to render my account,
"And shall I wait a day ere I decide
"On doing or not doing justice here?
"Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,
"Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
"And end one business more!"

So said, so done—
Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this,
I find, with his particular chirograph,
His own no such infirm hand, Friday night;
And next day, February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,
—Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place
On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,
Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,
('Twas not so well i' the way of Rome, beside,
The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido's rank)
But at the city's newer gayer end,—
The cavalcading promenading place
Beside the gate and opposite the church
Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
'Neath the obelisk[3] 'twixt the fountains in the Square,
Did Guido and his fellows find their fate,
All Rome for witness, and—my writer adds—
Remonstrant in its universal grief,
Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome.

[1] *Molinists:* followers of Miguel Molinos, a Spaniard, who published at Rome in 1675 a work of mystical or "quietistic" theology, entitled the *Guida Spirituale* or Spiritual Guide, which attracted much attention, but was declared heretical by the heads of the Church. Allusions to the orthodox dislike or dread of Molinism at this time recur frequently in this poem.

[2] *Carlines:* a small silver coin, worth about twopence.

[3] *Obelisk:* the obelisk brought from Egypt by Augustus and placed in the Circus Maximus; whence, having fallen down, it was removed by Pope Sixtus V. in 1589, and set up in the Piazza del Popolo, below the Monte Pincio.

This is the bookful ; thus far take the truth,
The untempered gold, the fact untampered with,
The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made !
And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves
The memory of this Guido, and his wife
Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,
The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,
Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?
Able to take its own part as truth should,
Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so—
Yonder's a fire, into it goes my book,
As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
You know the tale already : I may ask,
Rather than think to tell you, more thereof,—
Ask you not merely who were he and she,
Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,
But how you hold concerning this and that
Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
He who, no question, did elope with her,
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi ;—his strange course
I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?
Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
By the husband as accomplices in crime,
Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse,—
What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside
Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
And satisfy the loving ones he saved ;
And so did welcome devils and their death?
I have been silent on that circumstance
Although the couple passed for close of kin
To wife and husband, were by some accounts
Pompilia's very parents : you know best.
Also that infant the great joy was for,
That Gaetano, the wife's two-weeks' babe,
The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,
Whose birth and being turned his night to day—
Why must the father kill the mother thus
Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you !) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question, laugh it ! I laugh first.
Truth must prevail, the proverb vows ; and truth
—Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome
Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade
Nor be forgotten. Yet, a little while,
The passage of a century or so,
Decads thrice five, and here's time paid his tax,
Oblivion gone home with her harvesting,
And all left smooth again as scythe could shave.
Far from beginning with you London folk,
I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
On likely people. "Have you met such names?
"Is a tradition extant of such facts?
"Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row :
"What if I rove and rummage?" "—Why, you'll waste
"Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
Everyone snickered : "names and facts thus old
"Are newer much than Europe news we find
"Down in to-day's *Diario*. Records, quotha?
"Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
"The rap-and-rending nation ! And it tells
"Against the Church, no doubt,—another gird
"At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?"
"—Quite otherwise this time," submitted I ;
"Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
"The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once."

"—The rarer and the happier! All the same,
"Content you with your treasure of a book,
"And waive what's wanting! Take a friend's advice!
"It's not the custom of the country. Mend
"Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point:
"Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
"By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
"By Wiseman, and we'll see or else we won't!
"Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
"A pretty piece of narrative enough,
"Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
"From the more curious annals of our kind.
"Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
"Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
"(The while you vault it through the loose and large)
"Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
"And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe,
"And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!
From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot[1] truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,—
Yes; but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed[2]
And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
After the day when,—truth thus grasped and gained,—
The book was shut and done with and laid by
On the cream-coloured massive agate, broad
'Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top.
And from the reading, and that slab I leant
My elbow on, the while I read and read,
I turned, to free myself and find the world,
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church,
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool;
Because Felice-church-side stretched, a-glow
Through each square window fringed for festival,
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights—
I know not what particular praise of God,
It always came and went with June. Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow[3] Jove rained on Rhodes,
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,
Drinking the blackness in default of air—
A busy human sense beneath my feet:
While in and out the terrace-plants, and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned
The lamp-fly lured there, wanting the white flower.
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
And there would lie Arezzo,[4] the man's town,
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,
A spectacle for angels,—ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo! Farther then I fared,

[1] *Lingot:* the same word as ingot; here = the solid mass of truth.
[2] *Djereed:* an Arab spear. The allusion is to a game analogous to tilting at a ring.
[3] *That gold snow:* the shower of gold in which Jove visited Danaë.
[4] *Arezzo:* in Tuscany, about 40 miles south-east of Florence.

Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two
Against the sudden bloody splendour poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun
O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn
Where they three, for the first time and the last,
Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.
Whence I went on again, the end was near,
Step by step, missing none and marking all,
Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.
Why, all the while,—how could it otherwise?—
The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome—
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save.
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away
Pompilia to be his for evermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
"Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"
I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell;
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
By Guido the main monster,—cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more,—
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo.
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again
That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there—
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
Whence long ago had curled the vapour first,
Blown big by nether fires to appal day:
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide.
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for,—
Too fain to follow over hill and dale
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea.
I saw them, in the potency of fear,
Break somehow through the satyr-family
(For a grey mother with a monkey-mien,
Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As, confident of capture, all took hands
And danced about the captives in a ring)
—Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so
Their loved one left with haters. These I saw,
In recrudescency of baffled hate,
Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
From body and soul thus left them: all was sure,
Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate: what of God?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their cauldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,

As, in a glory of armour like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more.
For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
He and the poor lost lady borne so brave,
—Checking the song of praise in me, had else
Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth—
Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,
No other than the angel of this life,
Whose care is lest men see too much at once.
He made the sign, such God-glimpse must suffice,
Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
Whose ministration piles us overhead
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage:
So took the lady, left the priest alone,
And once more canopied the world with black.
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
And where a solitary villa stood
In a lone garden-quarter: it was eve,
The second of the year, and oh so cold!
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha? 610
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled—Oh God that madest man!
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—
That was the policy and master-stroke—
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—
"Open to Caponsacchi!" Guido cried:
"Gabriel!" cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple, and their child
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them. Close eyes! And when the corpses lay
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
Were safe-embosomed by the night again,
I knew a necessary change in things;
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,
And there comes duly, to take cognizance,
The scrutinizing eye-point of some star—
And who despairs of a new daybreak now?
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five!
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed
Awhile they palpitated on the spear
Motionless over Tophet: stand or fall?
"I say, the spear should fall—should stand, I say!"
Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace
Or dealing doom according to world's wont,
Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road
At prick and summons of the primal curse
Which bids man love as well as make a lie.
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves,
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece;
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
And motioned that the arrested point decline:
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there.
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk

And trim the balance, and detect at least
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf,—
Vex truth a little longer :—less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn.
Till all at once the memory of the thing,—
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,—
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze,—
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind.
Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,
Lay of the column ; and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds.
Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
For all the crumblement, this abacus,[1]
This square old yellow book,—could calculate
By this the lost proportions of the style.

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,
But lacked a listener seldom ; such alloy,
Such substance of me interfused the gold
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last
Lay ready for the renovating wash
O' the water. "How much of the tale was true?"
I disappeared ; the book grew all in all ;
The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size,—
Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
For more commodity of carriage, see !—

[1] *Abacus:* the upper part of the capital of a pillar, on which the architrave rests. In its earliest forms it is generally square in shape.

And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
To stay the craving of a client there,
Who bound the same and so produced my book.
Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?
Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now ; there's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth : yet this, the something else,
What's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleolable
O' the gold was not mine,—what's your name for this?
Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
The somehow may be thishow.
I find first
Writ down for very A B C of fact,
"In the beginning God made heaven and earth ;"
From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell
And speak you out a consequence—that man,
Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—
Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,—
Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—
Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
Attaining man's proportionate result,—
Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.
Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
Which turns thought, act—conceives, expresses too !
No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
May so project his surplusage of soul
In search of body, so add self to self
By owning what lay ownerless before,—

So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
That, although nothing which had never life
Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
Yet, something dead may get to live again,
Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,—
Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp
Stationed for temple-service on this earth,
These indeed let him breathe on and relume!
For such man's feat is, in the due degree,
—Mimic creation, galvanism for life,
But still a glory portioned in the scale.
Why did the mage say,—feeling as we are wont
For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,
And resting on a lie,—"I raise a ghost"?
"Because," he taught adepts, "man makes not man.
"Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
"More insight and more outsight and much more
"Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
"I can detach from me, commission forth
"Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
"O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
"May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
"Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
"Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
"I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
"Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
"(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
"What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
"Mistakenly felt: then write my name with Faust's!"
Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once?—
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened. 'Tis a credible feat
With the right man and way.
Enough of me!
The Book! I turn its medicinable leaves
In London now till, as in Florence erst,
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
Letting me have my will again with these
—How title I the dead alive once more?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old,—having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents; killed the three,
Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
First-born and heir to what the style was worth
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
This deed just as he purposed point by point.
Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
And captured with his co-mates that same night,
He, brought to trial, stood on this defence—

Injury to his honour caused the act;
And since his wife was false, (as manifest
By flight from home in such companionship,)
Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
And faithless parents who abetted her
I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man.
"Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
The accuser; "cloaked and masked this murder glooms;
"True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair;
"Out of the man's own heart a monster curled
"Which—crime coiled with connivancy at crime—
"His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared;
"Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!"
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt;
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to: who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Let this old woe step on the stage again!
Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
Not by the very sense and sight indeed—
(Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
—No dose of purer truth than man digests,
But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
Not strong meat he may get to bear some day—
To-wit, by voices we call evidence,
Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
Yet helping us to all we seem to hear:
For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound
In due succession. First, the world's outcry
Around the rush and ripple of any fact
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things;
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
At what were figure and substance, by their splash:
Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
At depth of deed already out of reach.
This threefold murder of the day before,—
Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth;
Honest enough, as the way is: all the same,
Harbouring in the centre of its sense
A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,
To neutralize that honesty and leave
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold;
So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide
O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck.
With this Half-Rome,—the source of swerving, call
Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong
Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right:
Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'Tis there—
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech.
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit
Aware he is not Æacus [1] the while,—
How such an one supposes and states fact
To whosoever of a multitude
Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast,
Born of a certain spectacle shut in
By the church Lorenzo opposite. So, they lounge
Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side,
'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
Linger and listen; keeping clear o' the crowd,
Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,

[1] *Æacus:* the colleague of Minos and Rhadamanthus as judge of the nether world; hence a type of impartiality.

(So universal is its plague of squint)
And make hearts beat our time that flutter false :
—All for the truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else !
How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse.

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess,—
Or if success, by no skill but more luck
This time, through siding rather with the wife,
Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
Than with the husband. One wears drab, one pink ;
Who wears pink, ask him "Which shall win the race,
"Of coupled runners like as egg and egg?"
"—Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf."
Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here.
A piece of public talk to correspond
At the next stage of the story ; just a day
Let pass and new day brings the proper change.
Another sample-speech i' the market-place
O' the Barberini by the Capucins ;
Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,
Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,
A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,
High over the caritellas, out o' the way
O' the motley merchandizing multitude.
Our murder has been done three days ago,
The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
And, to the very tiles of each red roof
A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad :
So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,
Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both !

Then, yet another day let come and go,
With pause prelusive still of novelty,
Hear a fresh speaker !—neither this nor that
Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both :
One and one breed the inevitable three.
Such is the personage harangues you next ;
The elaborated product, *tertium quid :*
Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain ?
You get a reasoned statement of the case,
Eventual verdict of the curious few
Who care to sift a business to the bran
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.
Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks ;
Here, clarity of candour, history's soul,
The critical mind, in short : no gossip-guess.
What the superior social section thinks,
In person of some man of quality
Who,—breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist,—
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase
'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole :[1]
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word—
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech.
How Quality dissertated on the case.

So much for Rome and rumour ; smoke comes first :
Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry
Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit
To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
According to its food, or pure or foul.
The actors, no mere rumours of the act,
Intervene. First you hear Count Guido's voice,
In a small chamber that adjoins the court,

[1] *Girandole :* a branched candlestick.

Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth.
Soft-cushioned sits he; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy;
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,
To passion; for the natural man is roused
At fools who first do wrong then pour the blame
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job.
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb;
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase,
Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege
—It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
Folly means no harm when she calls black white!
—Eruption momentary at the most,
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire,
Sage acquiescence; for the world's the world,
And, what it errs in, Judges rectify:
He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
And never once does he detach his eye
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself,
Despite,—what twitches brow and makes lip wince,—
His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil-torture more facetiously.
Even so; they were wont to tease the truth
Out of loth witness (toying, trifling time)
By torture: 'twas a trick, a vice of the age,
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?
Religion used to tell Humanity
She gave him warrant or denied him course.
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked;
And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
Nor sound of interference from her mouth,
But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,
Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
Muttered "'Tis a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
"Should have been counted sin; I make it so:
"At any rate no more of it for me—
"Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus!"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
"What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee!
"Did I forget to abrogate its use?
"Be the mistake in common with us both!
"—One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
"Down in my book denounced though it must be
"Somewhere. Henceforth find truth by milder means!"
Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
And pick such place out, we should wait indeed!
That is all history: and what is not now,
Was then, defendants found it to their cost.
How Guido, after being tortured, spoke.

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil!—
In days when that was rife which now is rare.
How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,
Played off the young frank personable priest;
Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,
And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
By law of love and mandate of the mode.
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work?

Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,[1]
Show colour of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast?
All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at;
Tells it, moreover, now the second time:
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation,—exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time,—
Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
And then advise in the matter. There stands he,
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi; and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink; waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born; for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
May blame, but needs not press too hard upon.
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port:
For why? The accused of eight months since,—the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then,—

[1] *Lutanist:* player on the lute.

Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
Because the seeming-solitary man,
Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
Invisible, no discreet judge provokes.
How the priest Caponsacchi said his say.

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
After the loud ones,—so much breath remains
Unused by the four-days'-dying; for she lived
Thus long, miraculously long, 'twas thought,
Just that Pompilia might defend herself.
How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
Comfort, yet question,—since the time is brief,
And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die,—
Pompilia tells the story of her life.
For friend and lover,—leech and man of law
Do service; busy helpful ministrants
As varied in their calling as their mind,
Temper and age: and yet from all of these,
About the white bed under the arched roof,
Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one,—
Small separate sympathies combined and large,
Nothings that were, grown something very much:
As if the bystanders gave each his straw,
All he had, though a trifle in itself,
Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
Fit to die looking on and praying with,
Just as well as if ivory or gold.
So, to the common kindliness she speaks,
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body: but she is used to bear,
And only unused to the brotherly look.
How she endeavoured to explain her life.

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
And teach our common sense its helplessness.
For why deal simply with divining-rod,
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
And ignore law, the recognized machine,

Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world?
The patent truth-extracting process,—ha?
Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel,
Give you a single grind of law at least!
One orator, of two on either side,
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue
—That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound
Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought?
That were too stunning, too immense an odds:
That point of vantage law lets nobly pass.
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case,
First fashion of a speech; the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates,—
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties!—
How he,—having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
And above all, public anxiety
To quiet, show its Guido in good hands,—
Also, as if such burdens were too light,
A certain family-feast to claim his care,
The birthday-banquet for the only son—
Paternity at smiling strife with law—
How he brings both to buckle in one bond;
And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
Turns to his task and settles in his seat
And puts his utmost means in practice now:
Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
Makes logic levigate[1] the big crime small:

Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
Conceives and inchoates the argument,
Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
—Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there.
How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing
Shall be—first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.

Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk
O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
From such exordium clap we to the close;
Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
On the other side, some finished butterfly,
Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,
To-morrow her persecutor,—composite, he,
As becomes who must meet such various calls—
Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language—ah, the gift of eloquence!
Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove,
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
In free enthusiastic careless fit,
On the first proper pinnacle of rock
Which offers, as reward for all that zeal,
To lure some bark to founder and bring gain:
While calm sits Caution, rapt with heaven-ward eye,
A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare
Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell.
"Well done, thou good and faithful!" she approves:
"Hadst thou let slip a faggot to the beach,

[1] *Levigate:* make light.

"The crew might surely spy thy precipice
"And save their boat; the simple and the slow
"Might so, forsooth, forestall the wrecker's fee!
"Let the next crew be wise and hail in time!"
Just so compounded is the outside man,
Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
With sudden age, bright devastated hair.
Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er
What never will be uttered else than so—
Since to the four walls, Forum and Mars' Hill,
Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose.
Clavecinist[1] debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums—shirking neither turn nor trill,
With desperate finger on dumb table-edge—
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,
Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, both
I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print
The cold black score, mere music for the mind—
The last speech against Guido and his gang,
With special end to prove Pompilia pure.
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame.

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate
Judgment save yours. Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
With prudence, probity and—what beside
From the other world he feels impress at times,
Having attained to fourscore years and six,—

[1] *Clavecinist:* player on the harpsichord.

How, when the court found Guido and the rest
Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
And passed the final sentence to the Pope,
He, bringing his intelligence to bear
This last time on what ball behoves him drop
In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
Send five souls more to just precede his own,
Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,
How he is wont to do God's work on earth.
The manner of his sitting out the dim
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
One table and one lathen crucifix.
There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company;
Grave but not sad,—nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast.
A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand,—
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room;
Unclasps a huge tome[2] in an antique guise,
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
That stands him in diurnal stead; opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use:
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
Till by the dreary relics of the west
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,

[2] *A huge tome:* the history of the Popes; see the opening of Book X.

Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith :
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should.
The manner of the judgment of the Pope.

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
Satan's old saw being apt here—skin for skin,
All a man hath that will he give for life.
While life was graspable and gainable,
And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her : when away she flew
And death came, death's breath rivelled up the lies,
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine
Of truth, i' the spinning : the true words shone last.
How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge foot : the same man, another voice.
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapour of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down—
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears—
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood.
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined ;
Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
While his feet fumble for the filth below ;
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood
Spite of the standard set up, verily
And in no trope at all, against him there :
For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly,
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist ;
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread,
And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
Grounded. Nor lacks there aught but that the group
Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,
"Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee!"—
When inside, from the true profound, a sign
Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,
Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,
And is absolved and reconciled with God.
Then they, intoning, may begin their march,
Make by the longest way for the People's Square,
Carry the criminal to his crime's award :
A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
Two gallows and Mannaia[1] crowning all.
How Guido made defence a second time.

Finally, even as thus by step and step
I led you from the level of to-day
Up to the summit of so long ago,
Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—
Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,
Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse,
To feed o' the fat o' the furrow : free to dwell,
Taste our time's better things profusely spread
For all who love the level, corn and wine,
Much cattle and the many-folded fleece.
Shall not my friends go feast again on sward,
Though cognizant of country in the clouds

[1] *Mannaia :* a kind of guillotine.

Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,
When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?
Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like,—
As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs!

A novel country: I might make it mine
By choosing which one aspect of the year
Suited mood best, and putting solely that
On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw:
—Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time
Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,
Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things.
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
Each facet-flash of the revolving year!—
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which make the miracle. See it for yourselves,
This man's act, changeable because alive!
Action now shrouds, nor shows the informing thought;
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
Once set such orbs,—white styled, black stigmatized,—
A-rolling, see them once on the other side
Your good men and your bad men every one
From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!)—whom I yet have laboured for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran,—
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the self-same me,—
Such labour had such issue, so I wrought
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.

A ring without a posy,[1] and that ring mine?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,

[1] *Posy*: a motto or rhyme, engraved inside a ring.

Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

II.—HALF-ROME.

What, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I'd meet.)
Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd:
This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze:
I'll tell you like a book and save your shins.
Fie, what a roaring day we've had! Whose fault?
Lorenzo in Lucina,—here's a church
To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
All comers from the Corso! If this crush
Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse
And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out
The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine.
Listen and estimate the luck they've had!
(The right man, and I hold him.)
Sir, do you see,
They laid both bodies in the church, this morn
The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,
Behind the little marble balustrade;
Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool
To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife
On the other side. In trying to count stabs,
People supposed Violante showed the most,
Till somebody explained us that mistake;
His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honour's sake,
Honoris causâ, that's the proper term.
A delicacy there is, our gallants hold,
When you avenge your honour and only then,
That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment:
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
Answered the purpose, so his face went free.
We fancied even, free as you please, that face
Showed itself still intolerably wronged;
Was wrinkled over with resentment yet,
Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,
Once the worst ended: an indignant air
O' the head there was—'tis said the body turned
Round and away, rolled from Violante's side
Where they had laid it loving-husband-like.
If so, if corpses can be sensitive,
Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
Pay back thus the succession of affronts
Whereto this church had served as theatre?
For see: at that same altar where he lies,
To that same inch of step, was brought the babe
For blessing after baptism, and there styled
Pompilia, and a string of names beside,
By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,
Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs.
Wait awhile! Also to this very step
Did this Violante, twelve years afterward,
Bring, the mock-mother, that child-cheat full-grown,
Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
And there brave God and man a second time
By linking a new victim to the lie.
There, having made a match unknown to him,
She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot
Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife;
Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
Marry a man, and honest man beside,
And man of birth to boot,—clandestinely
Because of this, because of that, because
O' the devil's will to work his worst for once,—
Confident she could top her part at need
And, when her husband must be told in turn,
Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,
Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool

Her Pietro into patience: so it proved.
Ay, 'tis four years since man and wife they grew,
This Guido Franceschini and this same
Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared
A Comparini and the couple's child:
Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,
Second to nought observable in Rome,
That couple lie now, murdered yestereve.
Even the blind can see a providence here.

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again,
Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye;
Serve the priests right! The organ-loft was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains:
For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
Yet they did manage matters, to be just,
A little at this Lorenzo. Body o' me!
I saw a body exposed once . . . never mind!
Enough that here the bodies had their due.
No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
And one big taper at each head and foot.

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,
Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
To pressure from behind, since all the world
Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy
Over from first to last: Pompilia too,
Those who had known her—what 'twas worth to them!
Guido's acquaintance was in less request;
The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
Made himself cheap; with him were hand and glove
Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient[1] sings.
Also he is alive and like to be:
Had he considerately died,—aha!
I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,
Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
Staring amain and crossing brow and breast.
"How now?" asked I. "'Tis seventy years," quoth he,
"Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
"Bodies set forth: a many have I seen,
"Yet all was poor to this I live and see.
"Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum:
"What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,
"Antichrist surely comes and doomsday's near.
"May I depart in peace, I have seen my see."
"Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road
"For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!"
"Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,
"I know it's horrid, hideous past belief,
"Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear;
"But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
"I' the course o' the day,—and she can't outlive night,—
"They'll bring her body also to expose
"Beside the parents, one, two, three a-breast;
"That were indeed a sight, which might I see,
"I trust I should not last to see the like!"
Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks,
Since doctors give her till to-night to live,
And tell us how the butchery happened. "Ah,
"But you can't know!" sighs he, "I'll not despair:
"Beside I'm useful at explaining things—
"As, how the dagger laid there at the feet,
"Caused the peculiar cuts; I mind its make,
"Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
"Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge
"To open in the flesh nor shut again:
"I like to teach a novice: I shall stay!"
And stay he did, and stay be sure he will.

A personage came by the private door
At noon to have his look: I name no names:

[1] *The ancient:* Horace (*Sat.* i. 7, 3, "Omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus").

Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,
Whose servitor in honourable sort
Guido was once, the same who made the match,
(Will you have the truth?) whereof we see effect.
No sooner whisper ran he was arrived
Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,
Who never lets a good occasion slip,
And volunteers improving the event.
We looked he'd give the history's self some help,
Treat us to how the wife's confession went
(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
And, may-be, throw in something of the Priest—
If he's not ordered back, punished anew,
The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured
Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.
Think you we got a sprig of speech akin
To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there?
Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow.
He did the murder in a dozen words;
Then said that all such outrages crop forth
I' the course of nature when Molinos' tares
Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church:
So slid on to the abominable sect
And the philosophic sin—we've heard all that,
And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)
But, for the murder, left it where he found.
Oh but he's quick, the Curate, minds his game!
And, after all, we have the main o' the fact:
Case could not well be simpler,—mapped, as it were,
We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,
By the red line, past mistake: one sees indeed
Not only how all was and must have been,
But cannot other than be to the end of time.
Turn out here by the Ruspoli! Do you hold
Guido was so prodigiously to blame?
A certain cousin of yours has told you so?
Exactly! Here's a friend shall set you right,
Let him but have the handsel of your ear.

These wretched Comparini were once gay
And galliard, of the modest middle class:
Born in this quarter seventy years ago
And married young, they lived the accustomed life,
Citizens as they were of good repute:
And, childless, naturally took their ease
With only their two selves to care about
And use the wealth for: wealthy is the word,
Since Pietro was possessed of house and land—
And specially one house, when good days smiled,
In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
Where he lived mainly; but another house
Of less pretension did he buy betimes,
The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,
I' the Pauline district, to be private there—
Just what puts murder in an enemy's head.
Moreover,—here's the worm i' the core, the germ
O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived,—
He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use
Lifelong, but to determine with his life
In heirs' default: so, Pietro craved an heir,
(The story always old and always new)
Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good
And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide
On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,
The child that should have been and would not be.

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,
With touch of agitation proper too,
Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
The miracle would in time be manifest,
An heir's birth was to happen: and it did.
Somehow or other,—how, all in good time!
By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear,—
A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God,—
A fiddle-pin's end! What imbeciles are we!
Look now: if some one could have prophesied,
"For love of you, for liking to your wife,
"I undertake to crush a snake I spy
"Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts.

"Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly!
"She'll soar to the safe: you'll have your crying out,
"Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your days
"In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
"Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old folk"—
How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself,
And kicked the conjuror! Whereas you and I,
Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands;
Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
"Strangle the black-eyed babe, so far so good,
"But on condition you relieve the man
"O' the wife and throttle him Violante too—
"She is the mischief!"

We had hit the mark.
She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
Send vigour to the lie now somewhat spent
By twelve years' service; lest Eve's rule decline
Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise,
Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day,
While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
Sat at serene cats'-cradle with his child,
Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old:
Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,
A visitor's premonitory cough,
And poverty had reached him in her rounds.

This came when he was past the working-time,
Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,
And who must but Violante cast about,
Contrive and task that head of hers again?
She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy:
So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to mid-stream; which means, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine[1]
Was head of an old noble house enough,
Not over-rich, you can't have everything,
But such a man as riches rub against,
Readily stick to,—one with a right to them
Born in the blood: 'twas in his very brow
Always to knit itself against the world,
Beforehand so, when that world stinted due
Service and suit: the world ducks and defers.
As such folks do, he had come up to Rome
To better his fortune, and, since many years,
Was friend and follower of a cardinal;
Waiting the rather thus on providence
That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,
Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
With the deftest on the Galilean pool:
But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave,
And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,
Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill top—
A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one
Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail!
Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,
Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,
The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe.

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years;
Got promise, missed performance — what would you have?
No petty post rewards a nobleman
For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,
And there's concurrence for each rarer prize;
When that falls, rougher hand and readier foot
Push aside Guido spite of his black looks.

[1] *Aretine:* native of Arezzo.

The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,
The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,
Determined on returning to his town,
Making the best of bad incurable,
Patching the old palace up and lingering there
The customary life out with his kin,
Where honour helps to spice the scanty bread.

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins
To go his journey and be wise at home,
In the right mood of disappointed worth,
Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
(Where was I with that angler-simile?)
And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked—
A gleam i' the gloom!

What if he gained thus much,
Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
And, after all, brought something back from Rome?
Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well
To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
And famished with the emptiness of hope,
Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want
Would you play family-representative,
Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
O'er what may prove the natural petulance
Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,
Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
Beginning life in turn with callow beak
Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled.
Such were the pinks and greys about the bait
Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all.

What constituted him so choice a catch,
You question? Past his prime and poor beside!
Ask that of any she who knows the trade.
Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
A palace one might run to and be safe
When presently the threatened fate should fall,
A big-browed master to block door-way up,
Parley with people bent on pushing by
And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores:
Is birth a privilege and power or no?
Also,—but judge of the result desired,
By the price paid and manner of the sale.
The Count was made woo, win and wed at once:
Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat
Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,
And had Pompilia put into his arms
O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink,
With sanction of some priest-confederate
Properly paid to make short work and sure.

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style
For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
Ere Guido knew it well; and why this haste
And scramble and indecent secrecy?
"Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
"Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match:
"His peevishness had promptly put aside
"Such honour and refused the proffered boon,
"Pleased to become authoritative once.
"She remedied the wilful man's mistake—"
Did our discreet Violante. Rather say,
Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance,
A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,
Might count the cost before he sold himself,
And try the clink of coin they paid him with.

But coin paid, bargain struck and business done,
Once the clandestine marriage over thus,
All parties made perforce the best o' the fact;
Pietro could play vast indignation off,
Be ignorant and astounded, dupe, poor soul,
Please you, of daughter, wife and son-in-law,
While Guido found himself in flagrant fault,
Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
A father not unreasonably chafed

Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir.
Pleasant initiation !

The end, this :
Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all—
Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too,—
Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three
Out of their limbo up to life again.
The Roman household was to strike fresh root
In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
Henceforth and never Roman any more,
By treaty and engagement ; thus it ran :
Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
As a thing of course,—she paid her own expense ;
No loss nor gain there : but the couple, you see,
They, for their part, turned over first of all
Their fortune in its rags and rottenness
To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
And his with them and theirs,—whatever rag
With coin residuary fell on floor
When Brother Paolo's energetic shake
Should do the relics justice : since 'twas thought,
Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach,
That, left at Rome as representative,
The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
And otherwise with purple flushing him,
Might play a good game with the creditor,
Make up a moiety which, great or small,
Should go to the common stock—if anything,
Guido's, so far repayment of the cost
About to be,—and if, as looked more like,
Nothing,—why, all the nobler cost were his
Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
Kith and kin, with the pick of company
And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last.
How say you to the bargain at first blush ?
Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
Show himself thus besotted all at once ?
Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all.

They went to Arezzo,—Pietro and his spouse,
With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend,
Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,
And realize the stuff and nonsense long
A-simmer in their noddles ; vent the fume
Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
How fares nobility while crossing earth,
What rampart or invisible body-guard
Keeps off the taint of common life from such.
They had not fed for nothing on the tales
Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,
Served with obeisances as when . . . what God ?
I'm at the end of my tether ; 'tis enough
You understand what they came primed to see :
While Guido who should minister the sight,
Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
With apples and with flagons—for his part,
Was set on life diverse as pole from pole :
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye,—what else
Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
After the very debauch they would begin ?—
Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were.
That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,
He had blown already till he burst his cheeks,
And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue.
He hoped now to walk softly all his days
In soberness of spirit, if haply so,
Pinching and paring he might furnish forth
A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend.

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
And make each other happy. The first week,
And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full.
"This," shrieked the Comparini, "this the Count,
"The palace, the signorial privilege,
"The pomp and pageantry were promised us ?
"For this have we exchanged our liberty,
"Our competence, our darling of a child ?
"To house as spectres in a sepulchre

"Under this black stone-heap, the street's disgrace,
"Grimmest as that is of the gruesome town,
"And here pick garbage on a pewter plate
"Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware?
"Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place
"I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?
"Where's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
"The neighbourliness, the companionship,
"The treat and feast when holidays came round,
"The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
"Called common by the uncommon fools we were!
"Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
"Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
"We will have justice, justice if there be!"
Did not they shout, did not the town resound!
Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
Had held sole sway i' the house,—the doited crone
Slow to acknowledge, curtsey and abdicate,—
Was recognized of true novercal type,
Dragon and devil. His brother Girolamo
Came next in order: priest was he? The worse!
No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry
And formal habits long since out of date,
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law.
Or did he brighten up by way of change,
Dispose himself for affability?
The malapert, too complaisant by half
To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere
Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months' probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counter-blast,
The devil's self were sick of his own din;
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step
And now the wine-house bench—while, on her side,
Violante up and down was voluble
In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
Curious to peep at the inside of things
And catch in the act pretentious poverty
At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
Make both ends meet,—nothing the vulgar loves
Like what this couple pitched them right and left.
Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched:
—Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face,
Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,
Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more.

I see the comment ready on your lip,
"The better fortune, Guido's—free at least
"By this defection of the foolish pair,
"He could begin make profit in some sort
"Of the young bride and the new quietness,
"Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued."
Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self.
Learn the Violante-nature!

Once in Rome,
By way of helping Guido lead such life,
Her first act to inaugurate return
Was, she got pricked in conscience: Jubilee
Gave her the hint. Our Pope, as kind as just,
Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee—
Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
And no rough dealing with the regular crime
So this occasion were not suffered slip—

Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
Without the least abatement in the price.
Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort
She must compound for now or not at all.
Now be the ready riddance! She confessed
Pompilia was a fable not a fact:
She never bore a child in her whole life.
Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,
You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie:
Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all,
All the lie hers—not even Pietro guessed
He was as childless still as twelve years since.
The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,
Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,
Down in the deepest of our social dregs,
A woman who professed the wanton's trade
Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife:
The creature thus conditioned found by chance
Motherhood like a jewel in the muck,
And straightway either trafficked with her prize
Or listened to the tempter and let be,—
Made pact abolishing her place and part
In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed.
She sold this babe eight months before its birth
To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,
Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown
To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape.
She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing
As very flesh and blood and child of her
Despite the flagrant fifty years,—and why?
Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup
With wine at the late hour when lees are left,
And send him from life's feast rejoicingly,—
Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape,
Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,
For that same principal of the usufruct[1]
It vext him he must die and leave behind.

Such was the sin had come to be confessed.
Which of the tales, the first or last, was true?
Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,
Sin for the first time? Either way you will.
One sees a reason for the cheat: one sees
A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
Where no cheat had been. What of the revenge?
What prompted the contrition all at once,
Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,
Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood,
Claimed nowise: Guido's claim was through his wife,
Null then and void with hers. The biter bit,
Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
One might conceive the penitential pair
Ready to bring their case before the courts,
Publish their infamy to all the world
And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content.

Is this your view? 'Twas Guido's anyhow
And colourable: he came forward then,
Protested in his very bride's behalf
Against this lie and all it led to, least
Of all the loss o' the dowry; no! From her
And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up
And glorified in a palace. Peter and Paul!
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill
By saying which is eye and which is mouth
Thro' those stabs thick and threefold,—but for that—
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir!
—Though prematurely, since there's more to come,
More that will shake your confidence in things
Your cousin tells you,—may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce,—anon
The sombre element comes stealing in

[1] *Principal of the usufruct: i.e.*, the principal sum, in which Pietro had only a life-interest or usufruct.

Till all is black or blood-red in the piece.
Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad,
A proverb for the market-place at home,
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft
So reputable on his ancient stock,
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,
What does the Count? Revenge him on his wife?
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,
And, careless whether the poor rag was 'ware
O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free?
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too
Saved her such scandal. She was young, he thought,
Not privy to the treason, punished most
I' the proclamation of it; why make her
A party to the crime she suffered by?
Then the black eyes were now her very own,
Not any more Violante's: let her live,
Lose in a new air, under a new sun,
The taint of the imputed parentage
Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!
All might go well yet.

So she thought, herself,
It seems, since what was her first act and deed
When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?
—For I should tell you that they noised abroad
Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
But slanders written, printed, published wide,
Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
Of how the promised glory was a dream,
The power a bubble, and the wealth—why, dust.
There was a picture, painted to the life,
Of those rare doings, that superlative
Initiation in magnificence
Conferred on a poor Roman family
By favour of Arezzo and her first
And famousest, the Franceschini there.
You had the Countship holding head aloft
Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits
In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,
The comic of those home-contrivances
When the old lady-mother's wit was taxed
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame—
Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce.
What, I ask,—when the drunkenness of hate
Hiccuped return for hospitality,
Befouled the table they had feasted on,
Or say,—God knows I'll not prejudge the case,—
Grievances thus distorted, magnified,
Coloured by quarrel into calumny,—
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?
Her first deliberate measure was—she wrote,
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome
And her husband's brother the Abate there,
Who, having managed to effect the match,
Might take men's censure for its ill success.
She made a clean breast also in her turn,
And qualified the couple properly,
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,
And the house, late distracted by their peals,
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live.
Herself had oftentimes complained: but why?
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales
Trumped up, devices to this very end.
Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond,—
Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less
Whose last injunction to her simple self
Had been—what parents'-precept do you think?
That she should follow after with all speed.

Fly from her husband's house clandestinely,
Join them at Rome again, but first of all
Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
So putting youth and beauty to fit use,—
Some gay dare-devil cloak-and-rapier spark
Capable of adventure,—helped by whom
She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,
Having put poison in the posset-cup,
Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
By way of parting benediction too,
Fired the house,—one would finish famously
I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
And turn up merrily at home once more.
Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!
And more than this, a fact none dare dispute,
Word for word, such a letter did she write,
And such the Abate read, nor simply read
But gave all Rome to ruminate upon,
In answer to such charges as, I say,
The couple sought to be beforehand with.

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,
Guido away, the Abate had no choice
But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
Defend the honour of himself beside.
He made what head he might against the pair,
Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate
And all her rights intact—hers, Guido's now:
And so far by his policy turned their flank,
(The enemy being beforehand in the place)
That,—though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,
Suffered Violante to parade her shame,
Publish her infamy to heart's content,
And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved,—
Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
And dispossess the innocents, befooled
By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice.
They would not take away the dowry now
Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,
Established on a fraud, nor play the game
Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child
As it might suit the gamester's purpose. Thus
Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome:
Such be the double verdicts favoured here
Which send away both parties to a suit
Nor puffed up nor cast down,—for each a crumb
Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf.
Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal—
Counter-appeal on Guido's,—that's the game:
And so the matter stands, even to this hour,
Bandied as balls are in a tennis-court,
And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,
Till doomsday.

Leave it thus, and now revert
To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome.
We've had enough o' the parents, false or true,
Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality.
The start's fair henceforth, every obstacle
Out of the young wife's footpath, she's alone,
Left to walk warily now: how does she walk?
Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed
In rubric by the enemy on his rounds
As eligible, as fit place of prey,
Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!
Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,
Presently at the window taps a horn,
And Satan's by your fireside, never fear!
Pompilia, left alone now, found herself;
Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
Matched with a husband old beyond his age
(Though that was something like four times her own)
Because of cares past, present and to come:
Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,
So, looked outside for light and life.
And love
Did in a trice turn up with life and light,—
The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,
The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!
A priest—what else should the consoler be?
With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg,
A portly make and a symmetric shape,
And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite.
This was a bishop in the bud, and now
A canon full-blown so far: priest, and priest
Nowise exorbitantly overworked,

The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul
As a saint of Cæsar's household: there posed he
Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,
Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake
Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires.
He, not a visitor at Guido's house,
Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request
With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,
Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path
If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too.
Now he threw comfits at the theatre
Into her lap,—what harm in Carnival?
Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,
His hand brushed hers,—how help on promenade?
And, ever on weighty business, found his steps
Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame
Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance;
While—how do accidents sometimes combine!—
Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms
Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street,
Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind.

This passage of arms and wits amused the town.
At last the husband lifted eyebrow,—bent
On day-book and the study how to wring
Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines
At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent
From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon,—
Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night
With "ruin, ruin;"—and so surprised at last—
Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps.
Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,
Prints of the paw about the outhouse; rife
In his head at once again are word and wink,
Mum here and *budget*[1] there, the smell o' the fox,
The musk o' the gallant. "Friends, there's falseness here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait
Is waggery, the world over. Laugh him free
O' the regular jealous-fit that's incident
To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
And he'll go duly docile all his days.
"Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
"How and why? Mere horn-madness: have a care!
"Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,
"Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself.
"And—what, it's Caponsacchi means you harm?
"The Canon? We caress him, he's the world's,
"A man of such acceptance—never dream,
"Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,
"He'd risk his brush for your particular chick,
"When the wide town's his hen-roost! Fie o' the fool!"
So they dispensed their comfort of a kind.
Guido at last cried "Something is in the air,
"Under the earth, some plot against my peace.
"The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead;
"How it should come of that officious orb
"Your Canon in my system, you must say:
"I say—that from the pressure of this spring
"Began the chime and interchange of bells,
"Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
"And just one whisper for the silvery last,
"Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
"Into a larum both significant
"And sinister: stop it I must and will.
"Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
"From the wire!—disport himself in other paths
"Than lead precisely to my palace-gate,—
"Look where he likes except one window's way
"Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,
"Happens to lean and say her litanies
"Every day and all day long, just my wife—
"Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse!"

[1] *Mum, budget:* see Shakespeare, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, V. ii. 7.

Admire the man's simplicity, "I'll do this,
"I'll not have that, I'll punish and prevent!"—
'Tis easy saying. But to a fray, you see,
Two parties go. The badger shows his teeth:
The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight.
Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
The way to put suspicion to the blush!
At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
I' the face of the world, you found her: she could speak,
State her case,—Franceschini was a name,
Guido had his full share of foes and friends—
Why should not she call these to arbitrate?
She bade the Governor do governance,
Cried out on the Archbishop,—why, there now,
Take him for sample! Three successive times,
Had he to reconduct her by main-force
From where she took her station opposite
His shut door,—on the public steps thereto,
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot,—
Back to the husband and the house she fled:
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face
Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk,
Or lacked the customary compliment
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!

So it went on and on till—who was right?
One merry April morning, Guido woke
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk;
And found his wife flown, his scritoire the worse
For a rummage,—jewelry that was, was not,
Some money there had made itself wings too,—
The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
Sound as the dead, or dosed which does as well.

In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
Had not so much as spoken all her life
To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
Between her fingers while she prayed in church,—
This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years
(Such she was grown to by this time of day)
Had simply put an opiate in the drink
Of the whole household overnight, and then
Got up and gone about her work secure,
Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,
Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
In company of the Canon who, Lord's love,
What with his daily duty at the church,
Nightly devoir wnere ladies congregate,
Had something else to mind, assure yourself,
Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt!
Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
Both of them were together jollily
Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,
While Guido was left go and get undrugged,
Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks
When neighbours crowded round him to condole.
"Ah," quoth a gossip, "well I mind me now,
"The Count did always say he thought he felt
"He feared as if this very chance might fall!
"And when a man of fifty finds his corns
"Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
"Though neighbours laugh and say the sky is clear,
"Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise!"
Then was the story told, I'll cut you short:
All neighbours knew: no mystery in the world.
The lovers left at nightfall—over night
Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
Pompilia,—not alone, a friend of his,
One Guillichini, the more conversant
With Guido's housekeeping that he was just
A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank—
(Have not you too a cousin that's a wag?)
—Lord and a Canon also,—what would you have?
Such are the red-clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads

That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the Church !—
This worthy came to aid, abet his best.
And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate.
Good-bye to the friendly Canon ; the loving one
Could peradventure do the rest himself.
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,
"Whip, driver ! Money makes the mare to go,
"And we've a bagful. Take the Roman road !"
So said the neighbours. This was eight hours since.

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit
With never a friend to follow, found the track
Fast enough, 'twas the straight Perugia way,
Trod soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, reached
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in,
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome,—as we say, in sight of Rome
And safety (there's impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at—what's the little place ?—
What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn,
There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,
Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
Secure they might foretaste felicity
Nor fear surprisal : so, they were surprised.
There did they halt at early evening, there
Did Guido overtake them : 'twas day-break ;
He came in time enough, not time too much,
Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self
Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
Harness the horses, have the journey end,
The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome.
And the other runaway, the wife ? Upstairs,
Still on the couch where she had spent the night,
One couch in one room, and one room for both.
So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby.

Sir, what's the sequel ? Lover and beloved
Fall on their knees ? No impudence serves here ?
They beat their breasts and beg for easy death,
Confess this, that and the other ?—anyhow
Confess there wanted not some likelihood
To the supposition so preposterous,
That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge,
More of the Canon than that black his coat,
Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim :
And that, O Canon, thy religious care
Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
To banish trouble from a lady's breast
So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean !
This you expect ? Indeed, then, much you err.
Not to such ordinary end as this
Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier.
The die was cast : over shoes over boots :
And just as she, I presently shall show,
Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,
Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
So, in the inn-yard, bold as 'twere Troy-town,
There strutted Paris in correct costume,
Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,
He seemed to find and feel familiar at.
Nor wanted words as ready and as big
As the part he played, the bold abashless one.
"I interposed to save your wife from death,
"Yourself from shame, the true and only shame :
"Ask your own conscience else !—or, failing that,
"What I have done I answer, anywhere,
"Here, if you will ; you see I have a sword :
"Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
"At Rome, by all means,—priests to try a priest.
"Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply !"
And then he fingered at the sword again.
So, Guido called, in aid and witness both.

The Public Force. The Commissary came,
Officers also ; they secured the priest ;
Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
With him, a guard on either side, the stair
To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep
His paramour and Guido's wife : in burst
The company and bade her wake and rise.

Her defence? This. She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth,
Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
That hung there useless,—since they held each hand
O' the lover, had disarmed him properly,—
And in a moment out flew the bright thing
Full in the face of Guido : but for help
O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
Prettily ; but she fought them one to six.
They stopped that,—but her tongue continued free :
She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
Thief, pandar—that the popular tide soon turned,
The favour of the very *sbirri*, straight
Ebbed from the husband, set toward his wife,
People cried "Hands off, pay a priest respect !"
And "persecuting fiend" and "martyred saint"
Began to lead a measure from lip to lip.

But facts are facts and flinch not ; stubborn things,
And the question "Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
"I' the poke of you ?"—admits of no reply.
Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
A wife caught playing truant if no more ;
While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
And, nose to face, an added palm in length,
Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him :
Capture once made, release could hardly be.
Beside, the prisoners both made appeal,
"Take us to Rome !"
Taken to Rome they were ;
The husband trooping after, piteously,
Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now—
No honour set firm on its feet once more
On two dead bodies of the guilty,—nay,
No dubious salve to honour's broken pate
From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar :
For Guido's first search,—ferreting, poor soul,
Here, there and everywhere in the vile place
Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,
Found,—furnishing a last and best regale,—
All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair
Since the first timid trembling into life
O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.
Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names,—was nought
Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all,
That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
Whereof the due proemium, months ago
These playwrights had put forth, and ever since
Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose.
He might go cross himself : the case was clear.

Therefore to Rome with the clear case ; there plead
Each party its best, and leave law do each right,
Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
The triumph of truth ! What else shall glad our gaze
When once authority has knit the brow
And set the brain behind it to decide
Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants ?

"This is indeed a business!" law shook head:
"A husband charges hard things on a wife,
"The wife as hard o' the husband: whose fault here?
"A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong:
"The male friend's interference looks amiss,
"Lends a suspicion: but suppose the wife,
"On the other hand, be jeopardized at home—
"Nay, that she simply hold, ill-groundedly,
"An apprehension she is jeopardized,—
"And further, if the friend partake the fear,
"And, in a commendable charity
"Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts,—
"What do they but obey law—natural law?
"Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,
"And circumstances that concur i' the close
"Hint as much, loudly—yet scarce loud enough
"To drown the answer 'strange may yet be true:'
"Innocence often looks like guiltiness.
"The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,
"Innocent were they both from first to last
"As male-babe haply laid by female-babe
"At church on edge of the baptismal font
"Together for a minute, perfect-pure.
"Difficult to believe, yet possible,
"As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint.
"The night at the inn—there charity nigh chokes
"Ere swallow what they both asseverate;
"Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
"When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh
"Out of its faculty and fleshliness,
"Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure:
"So long a flight necessitates a fall
"On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
"And the first pillow, though the lion's back:
"Difficult to believe, yet possible.
"Last come the letters' bundled beastliness—
"Authority repugns give glance to—nay,
"Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall;
"Yet here a voice cries 'Respite!' from the clouds—
"The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim,
"Abominate the horror: 'Not my hand'
"Asserts the friend—'Nor mine' chimes in the wife,
"'Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all.'
"Illiterate—for she goes on to ask,
"What if the friend did pen now verse now prose,
"Commend it to her notice now and then?
"'Twas pearls to swine: she read no more than wrote,
"And kept no more than read, for as they fell
"She ever brushed the burr-like things away,
"Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke.
"As for this fardel, filth and foolishness,
"She sees it now the first time: burn it too!
"While for his part the friend vows ignorance
"Alike of what bears his name and bears hers:
"'Tis forgery, a felon's masterpiece,
"And, as 'tis said the fox still finds the stench,
"Home-manufacture and the husband's work.
"Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,
"That certain missives, letters of a sort,
"Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves
"To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
"In his path: wherefrom he understood just this—
"That were they verily the lady's own.
"Why, she who penned them, since he never saw
"Save for one minute the mere face of her,
"Since never had there been the interchange
"Of word with word between them all their life,
"Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
"And fit, she for the '*apage*'[1] he flung,
"Her letters for the flame they went to feed!
"But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
"Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
"For a moment the minutest measurable,

[1] *Apage:* "away with thee!"

"He coupled her with the first flimsy word
"O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul
"Furnished forth: stop his films and stamp on him!
"Never was such a tangled knottiness,
"But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
"And mark how her decision suits the need!
"Here's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides,
"Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime:
"Let each side own its fault and make amends!
"What does a priest in cavalier's attire
"Consorting publicly with vagrant wives
"In quarters close as the confessional,
"Though innocent of harm? 'Tis harm enough:
"Let him pay it,—say, be relegate a good
"Three years, to spend in some place not too far
"Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far,
"Rome and Arezzo,—Civita we choose,
"Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
"Find out the proper function of a priest,
"Nowise an exile,—that were punishment,—
"But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way
"Not more from the husband's anger than, mayhap
"His own . . . say, indiscretion, waywardness,
"And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm.
"For the wife,—well, our best step to take with her,
"On her own showing, were to shift her root
"From the old cold shade and unhappy soil
"Into a generous ground that fronts the south
"Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,
"Craved simply warmth and called mere passers-by
"To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine.
"Do house and husband hinder and not help?
"Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
"Come into our community, enroll
"Herself along with those good Convertites,[1]
"Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,
"Accept their ministration, well bestow
"Her body and patiently possess her soul,
"Until we see what better can be done.
"Last for the husband: if his tale prove true,
"Well is he rid of two domestic plagues—
"Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would,
"And friend of hers that undertook the cure.
"See, what a double load we lift from breast!
"Off he may go, return, resume old life,
"Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there
"In limbo each and punished for their pains,
"And grateful tell the inquiring neighbourhood—
"In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy."
The case was closed. Now, am I fair or no
In what I utter? Do I state the facts,
Having forechosen a side? I promised you!

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie
The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,
Make the impressive entry on his place
Of relegation, thrill his Civita,
As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,
Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus: where,—
What with much culture of the sonnet-stave
And converse with the aborigines,
Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll
And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat
And wanted setting right in charity,—
What were a couple of years to while away?
Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself
To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood
In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
"Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
"Is heaven," cried she,—was therefore suited so.
But for Count Guido Franceschini, he—
The injured man thus righted—found no heaven

[1] *Convertites:* a society maintaining a penitentiary for women.

I' the house when he returned there, I engage,
Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
In a chorus of inquiry. "What, back—you?
"And no wife? Left her with the Penitents?
"Ah, being young and pretty, 'twere a shame
"To have her whipped in public: leave the job
"To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours—
"(Pontifex Maximus[1] whipped Vestals once)
"Our madcap Caponsacchi: think of him!
"So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?
"Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!
"The wiser, 'tis a word and a blow with him,
"True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack
"That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was:
"He had done enough, to firk you were too much.
"And did the little lady menace you,
"Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?
"The spitfire! Well, thank God you're safe and sound,
"Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no
"The lady broke the seventh: I only wish
"I were as saint-like, could contain me so.
"I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left
"Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!"
You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word,
Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?
Was it enough to make a wise man mad?
Oh, but I'll have your verdict at the end!

Well, not enough, it seems: such mere hurt falls,
Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less,
And so gets done with. Such was not the scheme
O' the pleasant Comparini: on Guido's wound
Ever in due succession, drop by drop,
Came slow distilment from the alembic here
Set on to simmer by Canidian[2] hate,
Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.
First fire-drop,—when he thought to make the best
O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,
Yet what might eke him out result enough
And make it worth while to have had the right
And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome.
Inadequate her punishment, no less
Punished in some slight sort his wife had been;
Then, punished for adultery, what else?
On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
And institute procedure in the courts
Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway:
He claimed in due form a divorce at least.

This claim was met now by a counterclaim:
Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board
Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,
Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate
Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
Blackened its centre,—hints of worse than hate,
Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
That mother's prompting. Such reply was made,
So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung
On Guido, who received bolt full in breast;
But no less bore up, giddily perhaps.
He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
Brother and friend and fighter on his side:
They rallied in a measure, met the foe
Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,
As if to shame supine law from her sloth:
And waiting her award, let beat the while
Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,
Safe from worse outrage. Let a scorpion nip,
And never mind till he contorts his tail!
But there was sting i' the creature; thus it struck.
Guido had thought in his simplicity—
That lying declaration of remorse,
That story of the child which was no child

[1] *Pontifex Maximus:* in ancient Rome, any Vestal Virgin who let the sacred fire go out was scourged by the Pontifex Maximus.

[2] *Canidian:* from Canidia, described by Horace as a malicious witch.

And motherhood no motherhood at all,
—That even this sin might have its sort of good
Inasmuch as no question more could be,—
Call it false, call the story true,—no claim
Of further parentage pretended now :
The parents had abjured all right, at least,
I' the woman owned his wife : to plead right still
Were to declare the abjuration false :
He was relieved from any fear henceforth
Their hands might touch, their breath defile again
Pompilia with his name upon her yet.
Well, no : the next news was, Pompilia's health
Demanded change after full three long weeks
Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood,—
Which rendered sojourn, — so the court opined,—
Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high
And windows narrow, nor was air enough
Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,
The last thing which had come in the court's head.
Propose a new expedient therefore,—this !
She had demanded—had obtained indeed,
By intervention of her pitying friends
Or perhaps lovers—(beauty in distress,
Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside,
Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck)—
Obtained remission of the penalty,
Permitted transfer to some private place
Where better air, more light, new food might soothe—
Incarcerated (call it, all the same)
At some sure friend's house she must keep inside,
Be found in at requirement fast enough,—
Domus pro carcere, in Roman style.
You keep the house i' the main, as most men do
And all good women : but free otherwise,
Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not ?
And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,
Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she ?
What house obtained Pompilia's preference ?
Why, just the Comparini's—just, do you mark,
Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her
So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
And only fell back on relationship
And found their daughter safe and sound again
When that might surelier stab him : yes, the pair
Who, as I told you, first had baited hook
With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
And gutted him,—now found a further use
For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again
I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand.
They took Pompilia to their hiding-place—
Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
Under observance, subject to control—
But out o' the way,—or in the way, who knows ?
That blind mute villa lurking by the gate
At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
By the honest eye, easy enough to find
In twilight by marauders : where perchance
Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,
Employ odd moments when he too tried change,
Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
Than relegation, penance and the rest.

Come, here's the last drop does its worst to wound :
Here's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,
Your boasted still's full strain and strength : not so !
One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.
He learned the true convenience of the change,
And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts
And helpful hands which female straits require,
When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
Pompilia—what ? sang, danced, saw company ?
—Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son.

I want your word now: what do you say to this?
What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,
And what did God say and the devil say
One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now
The father? Why, the overburdened mind
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze.
In fury of the moment—(that first news
Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,
Doing his farm-work,)—why, he summoned steward,
Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts
From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal,
Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,
But this clown with a mother or a wife,
That clodpole with a sister or a son:
And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,
What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out?

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,
At the villa door: there was the warmth and light—
The sense of life so just an inch inside—
Some angel must have whispered "One more chance!"

He gave it: bade the others stand aside:
Knocked at the door,—"Who is it knocks?" cried one.
"I will make," surely Guido's angel urged,
"One final essay, last experiment,
"Speak the word, name the name from out all names
"Which, if,—as doubtless strong illusions are,
"And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,
"And, since I am but man, I dare not do
"God's work until assured I see with God,—
"If I should bring my lips to breathe that name
"And they be innocent,—nay, by one mere touch
"Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt,—
"That name will bar the door and bid fate pass.
"I will not say 'It is a messenger,
"'A neighbour, even a belated man,
"'Much less your husband's friend, your husband's self:'
"At such appeal the door is bound to ope.
"But I will say"—here's rhetoric and to spare!
Why, Sir, the stumbling-block is cursed and kicked,
Block though it be; the name that brought offence
Will bring offence: the burnt child dreads the fire
Although that fire feed on some taper-wick
Which never left the altar nor singed a fly:
And had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
How would you wait him, stand or step aside,
When next you heard he rolled your way? Enough.

"Giuseppe Caponsacchi!" Guido cried;
And open flew the door: enough again.
Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
That holds a monster in it, over the house,
And wiped its filthy four walls free at last
With a wash of hell-fire,—father, mother, wife,
Killed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
And, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
Haled hither and imprisoned yesternight
O' the day all this was.
Now, Sir, tale is told,
Of how the old couple come to lie in state
Though hacked to pieces,—never, the expert say,
So thorough a study of stabbing—while the wife
(Viper-like, very difficult to slay)
Writhes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
At the Hospital hard by—survives, we'll hope,
To somewhat purify her putrid soul
By full confession, make so much amends
While time lasts; since at day's end die she must.

For Caponsacchi,—why, they'll have him here,
As hero of the adventure, who so fit
To figure in the coming Carnival?

'Twill make the fortune of whate'er saloon
Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye
Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
Capture, with hints of kisses all between—
While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,
No longer fit to laugh at since the blood
Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,
Why, he and those four luckless friends of his
May tumble in the straw this bitter day—
Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life,
Follows if but for form's sake: yes, indeed!

But with a certain issue: no dispute,
"Try him," bids law: formalities oblige:
But as to the issue,—look me in the face!—
If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,
Master or men—touch one hair of the five,
Then I say in the name of all that's left
Of honour in Rome, civility i' the world
Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source,—
There's an end to all hope of justice more.
Astræa's[1] gone indeed, let hope go too!
Who is it dares impugn the natural law,
Deny God's word "the faithless wife shall die"?
What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn
This crowd of miseries make the man a mark,
Accumulate on one devoted head
For our example?—yours and mine who read
Its lesson thus—"Henceforward let none dare
"Stand, like a natural in the public way,
"Letting the very urchins twitch his beard
"And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
"Be styled male-Grissel or else modern Job!"
Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
That morning when he came up with the pair
At the wayside inn,—exacted his just debt
By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,

[1] *Astræa:* daughter of Zeus and Themis, whose departure from earth marked the ending of the golden age.

And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,
In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,[2]
—Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft
The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
To-wit, those letters and last evidence
Of shame, each package in its proper place,—
Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls,—
I say, the world had praised the man. But no!
That were too plain, too straight, too simply just!
He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help.
And law, distasteful to who calls in law
When honour is beforehand and would serve,
What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
(Smiling a little) "'Tis yourself assess
"The worth of what's lost, sum of damage done.
"What you touched with so light a finger-tip,
"You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
"Why must law gird herself and grapple with?
"Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood
"Asks heat from law whose veins run luke-warm milk,—
"What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
"Heinous forsooth?"
Sir, what's the good of law
In a case o' the kind? None, as she all but says.
Call in law when a neighbour breaks your fence,
Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
Touches the purse or pocket,—but wooes your wife?
No: take the old way trod when men were men!
Guido preferred the new path,—for his pains,
Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse
Until he managed somehow scramble back
Into the safe sure rutted road once more,
Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman.

[2] *Clavicle:* collar-bone.

Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt
He made too rash amends for his first fault,
Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,
And lit i' the mire again,—the common chance,
The natural over-energy: the deed
Maladroit yields three deaths instead of one,
And one life left: for where's the Canon's corpse?
All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank—
The better for you and me and all the world,
Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.
The thing is put right, in the old place,—ay,
The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
Fresh from the brine: a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that's near,
Of a certain what's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
About a house here, where I keep a wife.
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so.)

III.—THE OTHER HALF-ROME.

ANOTHER day that finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital-array,
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise
You'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive i' the ruins. 'Tis a miracle.
It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
She prayed Madonna just that she might live
So long as to confess and be absolved;
And whether it was that, all her sad life long
Never before successful in a prayer,
This prayer rose with authority too dread,—
Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
By compensation, when the blackness broke
She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
To show her for a moment such things were,—
Or else,—as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
The friar who took confession from her lip,—
When a probationary soul that moved
From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,
The angels love to do their work betimes,
Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God.
Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
She lies, with overplus of life beside
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
And—with best smile of all reserved for him—
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.
A miracle, so tell your Molinists!

There she lies in the long white lazar-house.
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence,
Too many by half,—complain the men of art,—
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit—justice must be done;
They took her witness, why the murder was.
Then the priests followed properly,—a soul
To shrive; 'twas Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad.
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast.
Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears—but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody,—
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life
At touch o' the bedclothes merely,—how much more
Had she but brushed the body as she tried!
Cavalier Carlo—well, there's some excuse
For him—Maratta who paints Virgins so—
He too must fee the porter and slip by

With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face:
"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
"That hatches you anon a snow-white chick."
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this and black the other! Mighty fine—
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
Four little years ago when, ask and have,
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria: eh?
'Tis just a flower's fate: past parterre we trip,
Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve—
"Yon blossom at the briar's end, that's the rose
"Two jealous people fought for yesterday
"And killed each other: see, there's undisturbed
"A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!"
Then cry we "Ah, the perfect paragon!"
Then crave we "Just one keepsake-leaf for us!"

Truth lies between: there's anyhow a child
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
Ruined: who did it shall account to Christ—
Having no pity on the harmless life
And gentle face and girlish form he found,
And thus flings back. Go practise if you please
With men and women: leave a child alone
For Christ's particular love's sake!—so I say.

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
Took on him to explain the secret cause
O' the crime: quoth he, "Such crimes are very rife,
"Explode nor make us wonder now-a-days,
"Seeing that Antichrist disseminates
"That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin:
"Molinos' sect will soon make earth too hot!"

"Nay," groaned the Augustinian, "what's there new?
"Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts
"While hearts are men's and so born criminal;
"Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
"Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
"Molinos may go whistle to the wind
"That waits outside a certain church, you know!"

Though really it does seem as if she here,
Pompilia, living so and dying thus,
Has had undue experience how much crime
A heart can hatch. Why was she made to learn
—Not you, not I, not even Molinos' self—
What Guido Franceschini's heart could hold?
Thus saintship is effected probably;
No sparing saints the process!—which the more
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
To sinnership, immunity and all.

For see now: Pietro and Violante's life
Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note
And quote for happy—see the signs distinct
Of happiness as we yon Triton's[1] trump.
What could they be but happy?—balanced so,
Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high,
Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
Nothing above, below the just degree,
All at the mean where joy's components mix.
So again, in the couple's very souls
You saw the adequate half with half to match,
Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
Making a whole that had all and lacked nought.
The round and sound, in whose composure just

[1] *Yon Triton:* see Book I. l. 898. The speaker is represented as being in the Piazza Barberini, near Bernini's fountain, composed of a Triton supported by dolphins.

The acquiescent and recipient side
Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
Violante's: both in union gave the due
Quietude, enterprise, craving and content,
Which go to bodily health and peace of mind.
But, as 'tis said a body, rightly mixed,
Each element in equipoise, would last
Too long and live for ever,—accordingly
Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the scale—
Ordained to get predominance one day
And so bring all to ruin and release,—
Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here:
"With mortals much must go, but something stays;
"Nothing will stay of our so happy selves."
Out of the very ripeness of life's core
A worm was bred—"Our life shall leave no fruit."
Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,
Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
And keep the kind up; not supplant themselves
But put in evidence, record they were,
Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.
"'Tis in a child, man and wife grow complete,
"One flesh: God says so: let him do his work!"

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want,
One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
Always befell when, as the day came round,
A certain yearly sum,—our Pietro being,
As the long name runs, an usufructuary,—
Dropped in the common bag as interest
Of money, his till death, not afterward,
Failing an heir: an heir would take and take,
A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
To nobody's hurt—the stranger else seized all.
Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped,
Making their mill go; but when wheel wore out,
The wave would find a space and sweep on free
And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbour's corn.

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more:
Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste,
So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice.
She told her husband God was merciful,
And his and her prayer granted at the last:
Let the old mill-stone moulder,—wheel unworn,
Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream
Adroitly, as before should go bring grist—
Their house continued to them by an heir,
Their vacant heart replenished with a child.
We have her own confession at full length
Made in the first remorse: 'twas Jubilee
Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke.
She found she had offended God no doubt,
So much was plain from what had happened since,
Misfortune on misfortune; but she harmed
No one i' the world, so far as she could see.
The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so
Or not at all: thus much seems probable
From the implicit faith, or rather say
Stupid credulity of the foolish man
Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit
Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
Matching his sixty-and-under. Him she blessed;
And as for doing any detriment
To the veritable heir,—why, tell her first
Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate,
Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
For a scramble just to make the mob break shins?
She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby.
While at the least one good work had she wrought,
Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat—
What was it to its subject, the child's self,
But charity and religion? See the girl!
A body most like—a soul too probably—
Doomed to death, such a double death as waits
The illicit offspring of a common trull,
Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself

Of a mere interruption to sin's trade,
In the efficacious way old Tiber knows.
Was not so much proved by the ready sale
O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?
Well then, she had caught up this castaway:
This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped,
She had picked from where it waited the foot-fall,
And put in her own breast till forth broke finch
Able to sing God praise on mornings now.
What so excessive harm was done?—she asked.

To which demand the dreadful answer comes—
For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
Both agents, conscious and inconscious, lie;
While she, the deed was done to benefit,
Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
Yonder where curious people count her breaths,
Calculate how long yet the little life
Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
Give them their story, then the church its group.

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there,
Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,
Joining the other round her preciousness—
Two walls that go about a garden-plot
Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole
Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,
Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
Patiently glorifies their solitude,—
Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmount
The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
Still hidden happily and shielded safe,—
Else why should miracle have graced the ground?
But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
What meant that laugh? The coping-stone was reached;
Nay, above towered a light tuft of bloom
To be toyed with by butterfly or bee,
Done good to or else harm to from outside:
Pompilia's root, stalk and a branch or two
Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's.
All which was taught our couple though obtuse,
Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest,
Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor,
The notable Abate Paolo—known
As younger brother of a Tuscan house
Whereof the actual representative,
Count Guido, had employed his youth and age
In culture of Rome's most productive plant—
A cardinal: but years pass and change comes,
In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
To broach a weighty business. Might he speak?
Yes—to Violante somehow caught alone
While Pietro took his after-dinner doze,
And the young maiden, busily as befits,
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off.

So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—
He dissertated on that Tuscan house,
Those Franceschini,—very old they were—
Not rich however—oh, not rich, at least,
As people look to be who, low i' the scale
One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favour of the money-bag! 'tis fair—
Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose
That being not so rich means all so poor!
Say rather, well enough—i' the way, indeed,
Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best:
Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith,
Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
Would but the Count have patience—there's the point!
For he was slipping into years apace,
And years make men restless—they needs must spy

Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
Some sparkle, tho' from topmost beacon-tip,
That warrants life a harbour through the haze.
In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights
And usual faces,—fain would settle himself
And have the patron's bounty when it fell
Irrigate far rather than deluge near,
Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome.
Sooth to say, 'twas the wiser wish: the Count
Proved wanting in ambition,—let us avouch,
Since truth is best,—in callousness of heart,
And winced at pin-pricks whereby honours hang
A ribbon o'er each puncture: his—no soul
Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed)
Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
Renounced the over-vivid family-feel—
Poor brother Guido! All too plain, he pined
Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess
And that dilapidated palace-shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare—
Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days—
Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air,
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats.
And now his harping on this one tense chord
The villa and the palace, palace this
And villa the other, all day and all night
Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
And made one's ear-drum ache: nought else would serve
But that, to light his mother's visage up
With second youth, hope, gaiety again,
He must find straightway, woo and haply win
And bear away triumphant back, some wife.
Well now, the man was rational in his way:
He, the Abate,—ought he to interpose?
Unless by straining still his tutelage
(Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership)
Across this difficulty: then let go,
Leave the poor fellow in peace! Would that be wrong?
There was no making Guido great, it seems,
Spite of himself: then happy be his dole!
Indeed, the Abate's little interest
Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw:
Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,
Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phœnix' tail,
And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
No lack of mothers here in Rome,—no dread
Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass!
The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest
To gather greyness there, give voice at length
And shame the brood . . . but it was long ago
When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth!
No, that at least the Abate could forestall.
He read the thought within his brother's word,
Knew what he purposed better than himself.
We want no name and fame—having our own:
No worldly aggrandizement—such we fly:
But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
Were yet untainted on this grimy earth,
Tender and true—tradition tells of such—
Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours—
If some good girl (a girl, since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor)
But with whatever dowry came to hand,—
There were the lady-love predestinate!
And somehow the Abate's guardian eye—
Scintillant, rutilant, fraternal fire,—
Roving round every way had seized the prize
—The instinct of us, we, the spiritualty!
Come, cards on table; was it true or false
That here—here in this very tenement—
Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide,
Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf
Guessed thro' the sheath that saved it from the sun?
A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
Over her head for fillet virginal,
A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?
He came to see; had spoken, he could no less—
(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
If harm were,—well, the matter was off his mind.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
(A certain purple gleam about the black)
And go forth grandly,—as if the Pope came next.
And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
And pour into his ear the mighty news
How somebody had somehow somewhere seen
Their tree-top-tuft of bloom above the wall,
And came now to apprize them the tree's self
Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball[1]
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck,
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with—
Hercules standing ready at the door.
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
Look very wise, a little woeful too,
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand,
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
Of Spain[2] across Babbuino the six steps,
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge,—
Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
And have congratulation from the world.

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
And told him Hercules was just the heir
To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap
Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.
Guido and Franceschini; a Count,—ay:
But a cross[3] i' the poke to bless the Count-ship? No!
All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,
Humours of the imposthume incident
To rich blood that runs thin,—nursed to a head
By the rankly-salted soil—a cardinal's court
Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,
He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,
Shaken off, said others,—but in any case
Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,
Was wanting to change town for country quick,
Go home again: let Pietro help him home!
The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,
Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched
Into the core of Rome, and fattened so;
But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole
Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,
Must shift for himself: and so the shift was this!
What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,
The little provision for his old age snuffed?
"Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list,
"But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
"Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
"Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
"Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
"Were there the value of one penny-piece
"To rattle 'twixt his palms—or likelier laugh,
"Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe?"

Home again, shaking oft the puzzled pate,
Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,
Yet point Violante where some solace lay
Of a rueful sort,—the taper, quenched so soon,
Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink—
Congratulate there was one hope the less
Not misery the more: and so an end.

The marriage thus impossible, the rest
Followed: our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,
Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow:
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,
Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness,

[1] *The Hesperian ball:* the golden apple which Hercules was required to fetch from the garden of the Hesperides.

[2] *The Square of Spain:* the Piazza di Spagna, in the present "English quarter" of Rome. The Via del Babbuino runs into it, and the "Boat-fountain" (Fontana della Barcaccia) stands in it.

[3] *Cross: i.e.*, a coin; an old expression, found in Goldsmith, Dryden, and earlier writers.

Found neighbours' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself
In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity,
Another wrappage, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step—
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie—
Only with fifty candles' company
Now, in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw,—doors shut and sacristan made sure,—
A priest—perhaps Abate Paolo—wed
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably
To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months, — witness the church register,—
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,)
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it,—each in turn
Patting the curly calm inconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk's talked out and a bargain struck.

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised.
Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers
And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
And make the best of matters: wrath at first,—
How else? pacification presently,
Why not?—could flesh withstand the impurpled one,
The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend?
Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"[1]
Knew where the mollifying oil should drop
To cure the creak o' the valve,—considerate
For frailty, patient in a naughty world.
He even volunteered to supervise
The rough draught of those marriage-articles
Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked:
Trust's politic, suspicion does the harm,
There is but one way to brow-beat this world,
Dumb-founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind,—
To go on trusting, namely, till faith move
Mountains.

And faith here made the mountains move.
Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too late!"—
Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on slough!"—
Counselled "If rashness then, now temperance!"—
Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,
Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,
Money and all, just what should sink a man.
By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith
Dowry, his wife's right; no rescinding there:
But Pietro, why must he needs ratify
One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit
Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag
Lest the son's service flag,—is reason and rhyme,
Above all when the son's a son-in-law.
Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot
Into the lap o' the daughter: and the son
Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,
Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field,
Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth
Present and in perspective, all renounced
In favour of Guido. As for the usufruct—
The interest now, the principal anon,
Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death:
Till when, he must support the couple's charge,
Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
To an alien for fulfilment of their pact.
Guido should at discretion deal them orts,[2]
Bread-bounty in Arezzo the strange place,—

[1] *A hinge:* the title *Cardinal* is derived from *cardo*, "a hinge."

[2] *Orts:* scraps.

They who had lived deliciously and rolled
Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before.
Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!
And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they.

But they touched bottom at Arezzo: there—
Four months' experience of how craft and greed
Quickened by penury and pretentious hate
Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize,—
Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,
Cruelty graduated, dose by dose
Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,
And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands.
The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes
Broke at last in their desperation loose,
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so;
Found their account in casting coat afar
And bearing off a shred of skin at least:
Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs
To Rome,—I nothing doubt, with such remorse
As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
Needs not be plagued with till a later day.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
In hope that memory not quite extinct
Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance—after the natural laugh,
And tributary "Just as we foretold—"
To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup,
Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,
Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
Who lived large and kept open house so long.
Not so Violante: ever a-head i' the march,
Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across,
She went first to the best adviser, God—
Whose finger unmistakably was felt
In all this retribution of the past.
Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!
But here too was what Holy Year would help,
Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin
Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin
Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake:
To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar
The soul unhampered by a feather-weight.
"I will" said she "go burn out this bad hole
"That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least
"Of hope to further plague by progeny:
"I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
"But pardoned too: Saint Peter pays for all."

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome,
Through the great door new-broken for the nonce
Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,
Up the left nave to the formidable throne,
Fell into file with this the poisoner
And that the parricide, and reached in turn
The poor repugnant Penitentiary
Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,
And then knelt down and whispered in his ear
How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe
On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
To Guido, and defrauded of his due
This one and that one,—more than she could name,
Until her solid piece of wickedness
Happened to split and spread woe far and wide:
Contritely now she brought the case for cure.

Replied the throne—"Ere God forgive the guilt,
"Make man some restitution! Do your part!
"The owners of your husband's heritage,
"Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir,—
"Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
"Theirs be the due reversion as before!
"Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
"Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus
"By love of what he thought his flesh and blood
"To alienate his all in her behalf,—

"Tell him too such contract is null and void!
"Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
"Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute
"Took at your hand that bastard of a whore
"You called your daughter and he calls his wife,—
"Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!
"Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

Who could gainsay this just and right award?
Nobody in the world: but, out o' the world,
Who knows?—might timid intervention be
From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
Substitute for celestial guardianship,
Pretending to take care of the girl's self:
"Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
"And telling truth relieves a liar like you,
"But how of my quite unconsidered charge?
"No thought if, while this good befalls yourself,
"Aught in the way of harm may find out her?"
No least thought, I assure you: truth being truth,
Tell it and shame the devil!
Said and done:
Home went Violante, disbosomed all:
And Pietro who, six months before, had borne
Word after word of such a piece of news
Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade,
Now at its entry gave a leap for joy,
As who—what did I say of one in a quag?—
Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby
Out of the mud, on ten toes stand once more.
"What? All that used to be, may be again?
"My money mine again, my house, my land,
"My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
"What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
"And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
"Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child
"That used to be my own with her great eyes—
"He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
"When proved as very a pauper as himself?
"Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
"And laugh 'But how you dreamed uneasily!
"'I saw the great drops stand here on your brow—
"'Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'
"No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake
"I see another outburst of surprise:
"The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,
"Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear—
"Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
"When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!
"Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,
"Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,
"Let her creep in and warm our breasts again!
"Why care for the past? We three are our old selves,
"And know now what the outside world is worth."
And so, he carried case before the courts;
And there Violante, blushing to the bone,
Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect
Her folly, and redress the injury done.

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,
That though indisputably clear the case
(For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome
To prove the truth o' the tale)—yet, patent wrong
Seemed Guido's; the first cheat had chanced on him:
Here was the pity that, deciding right,
Those who began the wrong would gain the prize.
Guido pronounced the story one long lie
Lied to do robbery and take revenge:
Or say it were no lie at all but truth,
Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
Without revenge to humanize the deed:

What had he done when first they shamed him thus?
But that were too fantastic: losels they,
And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie,
They lied to blot him though it brand themselves.

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth.
Wherefore the court, its customary way,
Inclined to the middle course the sage affect.
They held the child to be a changeling,—good:
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,
Should yet be his, if not by right then grace—
Part-payment for the plain injustice done.
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,
Renunciation of his own estate,
That must be cancelled—give him back his gifts,
He was no party to the cheat at least!
So ran the judgment:—whence a prompt appeal
On both sides, seeing right is absolute.
Cried Pietro "Is the child no child of mine?
"Why give her a child's dowry?"—"Have I right
"To the dowry, why not to the rest as well?"
Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name:
Till law said "Reinvestigate the case!"
And so the matter pends, to this same day.

Hence new disaster—here no outlet seemed;
Whatever the fortune of the battle-field,
No path whereby the fatal man might march
Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,
And back turned full upon the baffled foe,—
Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl
Worm-like, and so away with his defeat
To other fortune and a novel prey.
No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
With his immense hate and, the solitary
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife.
"Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?
"Easily said! But still the action pends,
"Still dowry, principal and interest,
"Pietro's possessions, all I bargained for,—
"Any good day, be but my friends alert,
"May give them me if she continue mine.
"Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes—
"Her voice that lisps me back their curse—her eye
"They lend their leer of triumph to—her lip
"I touch and taste their very filth upon?"

In short, he also took the middle course
Rome taught him—did at last excogitate
How he might keep the good and leave the bad
Twined in revenge, yet extricable,—nay
Make the very hate's eruption, very rush
Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
His heart first, then go fertilize his field.
What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
It were impolitic to thrust her on?
If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,
Branded as runaway not castaway,
Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
So should the loathed form and detested face
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms;
So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
And bury in the breakage three at once:
While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,
None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
Should ask law what it was law paused about—
If law were dubious still whose word to take,
The husband's—dignified and derelict,
Or the wife's—the . . . what I tell you. It should be.

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite
A letter to the Abate,—not his own,
His wife's,—she should re-write, sign, seal and send.
She liberally told the household-news,
Rejoiced her vile progenitors were gone,
Revealed their malice—how they even laid

A last injunction on her, when they fled,
That she should forthwith find a paramour,
Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
Then burn the house down,—taking previous care
To poison all its inmates overnight,—
And so companioned, so provisioned too,
Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay.
This letter, traced in pencil-characters,
Guido as easily got re-traced in ink
By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
As if it had been just so much Chinese.
For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps,
Pray certainly, but no more read than write
This letter "which yet write she must," he said,
"Being half courtesy and compliment,
"Half sisterliness: take the thing on trust!"
She had as readily re-traced the words
Of her own death-warrant,—in some sort 'twas so.
This letter the Abate in due course
Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,
What the hubbub meant: "Nay,—see the wife's own word,
"Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
"There's a plan formed, a programme figured here
"—Pray God no after-practice put to proof,
"This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome: back now
To Arezzo, follow up the project there,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see!
Accordingly did Guido set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars,—
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one
Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
She needs must seize as sole way of escape
Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
To seem as if it tempted,—just the plume
O' the popinjay, not a real respite there
From tooth and claw of something in the dark,—
Giuseppe Caponsacchi.
Now begins
The tenebrific passage of the tale:
How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?
How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?
Here is the dying wife who smiles and says
"So it was,—so it was not,—how it was,
"I never knew nor ever care to know—"
Till they all weep, physician, man of law,
Even that poor old bit of battered brass
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
Common utensil of the lazar-house—
Confessor Celestino groans "'Tis truth,
"All truth and only truth: there's something here,
"Some presence in the room beside us all,
"Something that every lie expires before:
"No question she was pure from first to last."
So far is well and helps us to believe:
But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet
Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow
At her good fame by putting finger forth,—
How can she render service to the truth?
The bird says "So I fluttered where a springe
"Caught me: the springe did not contrive itself,
"That I know: who contrived it, God forgive!"
But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,
Must ask,—we cannot else, absolving her,—
How of the part played by that same decoy
I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?
We deal here with no innocent at least,
No witless victim,—he's a man of the age
And priest beside,—persuade the mocking world
Mere charity boiled over in this sort!
He whose own safety too,—(the Pope's apprised—
Good-natured with the secular offence,

The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)
Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life,
Hangs on the issue! You will find it hard.
Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot,
Stiff like a statue—"Leave what went before!
"My wife fled i' the company of a priest,
"Spent two days and two nights alone with him:
"Leave what came after!" He stands hard to throw.
Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood;
When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,
'Tis no such great ill-fortune: finding grey,
We gladly call that white which might be black,
Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest,
Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave
Way to the natural weakness. . . . Anyhow
Here be facts, charactery; what they spell
Determine, and thence pick what sense you may!
There was a certain young bold handsome priest
Popular in the city, far and wide
Famed, since Arezzo's but a little place,
As the best of good companions, gay and grave
At the decent minute; settled in his stall,
Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
Ever the courtly Canon; see in him
A proper star to climb and culminate,
Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,
As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,
To rub off redness and rusticity
Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere!
Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
This Caponsacchi, favourite of the town,
Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
Though both moved in the regular magnates' march:
Each must observe the other's tread and halt
At church, saloon, theatre, house of play.
Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,
The black of his brow—or miss the news that buzzed
Of how the little solitary wife
Wept and looked out of window all day long?
What need of minute search into such springs
As start men, set o' the move?—machinery
Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun.
Why, take men as they come,—an instance now,—
Of all those who have simply gone to see
Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
Half at the least are, call it how you please,
In love with her—I don't except the priests
Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run
Over at what he styles his sister's voice
Who died so early and weaned him from the world.
Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed
The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,
Might let shy life run back and raise the flower
Rich with reward up to the guardian's face,—
Would they have kept that hand employed all day
At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
Men are men: why then need I say one word
More than that our mere man the Canon here
Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why;
This startling why: that Caponsacchi's self—
Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good
Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
Intrepid altogether, reckless too
How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
Suffer by any turn the adventure take,
Nay, more—not thrusting, like a badge to hide,
'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame—
But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love
For the lady,—oh, called innocent love, I know!
Only, such scarlet fiery innocence
As most folk would try muffle up in shade,—
—'Tis strange then that this else abashless mouth

Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
That it was not he made the first advance,
That, even ere word had passed between the two,
Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
If not love, then so simulating love
That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot
At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip
Till . . . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith:
There must be falsehood somewhere. For her part,
Pompilia quietly constantly avers
She never penned a letter in her life
Nor to the Canon nor any other man,
Being incompetent to write and read:
Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
To her till that same evening when they met,
She on her window-terrace, he beneath
I' the public street, as was their fateful chance,
And she adjured him in the name of God
To find out, bring to pass where, when and how
Escape with him to Rome might be contrived.
Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers,
And heart assured to heart in loyalty,
All at an impulse! All extemporized
As in romance-books! Is that credible?
Well, yes: as she avers this with calm mouth
Dying, I do think "Credible!" you'd cry—
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell.
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
For truth's sake did assert and re-assert
These letters called him to her and he came,
—Which damns the story credible otherwise.
Why should this man,—mad to devote himself,
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first,—
Be studious thus to publish and declare
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide,
So screening lady from the byword's laugh
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"
—I say,—why should the man tell truth just now
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?
Or is there a first moment for a priest
As for a woman, when invaded shame
Must have its first and last excuse to show?
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise,—
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down,
Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
Can it be that the husband, he who wrote
The letter to his brother I told you of,
I' the name of her it meant to criminate,—
What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
Further the priest says, when it first befell,
This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,
Put them back lightly each with its reply.
Here again vexes new discrepancy:
There never reached her eye a word from him:
He did write but she could not read—could just
Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood,
So did burn: never bade him come to her,
Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
And when he did come though uncalled,—why, spoke
Prompt by an inspiration: thus it chanced.
Will you go somewhat back to understand?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,
Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
On soul and body of his wife, she cried
To those whom law appoints resource for such,
The secular guardian,—that's the Governor,
And the Archbishop,—that's the spiritual guide,
And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh.
Now, this is ever the ill consequence
Of being noble, poor and difficult,
Ungainly, yet too great to disregard,—

This—that born peers and friends heredi-
tary,—
Though disinclined to help from their own
store
The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
From private purse or leave the door ajar
When he goes wistful by at dinner-time,—
Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit
Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the
place—
And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse
undrawn,
Still potentates may find the office-seat
Do as good service at no cost—give help
By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
Just through a feather-weight too much i'
the scale,
Or finger-tip forgot at the balance-tongue,—
Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists.
Thus when, in the first roughness of sur-
prise
At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
Rushed to the Governor,—who else rights
wrong?
Told him their tale of wrong and craved
redress—
Why, then the Governor woke up to the
fact
That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count!—
So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the
pair,
Wholesome chastisement should soon cure
their qualms
Next time they came, wept, prated and told
lies:
So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to
Rome.
Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try:
The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
To the other mighty man, sobbed out her
prayer
At footstool of the Archbishop — fast the
friend
Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of
yore!

So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
By the Governor, break custom more than he,
Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her
tongue,
Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
Coached her and carried her to the Count
again,
—His old friend should be master in his house,
Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!
Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,
She, as a last resource, betook herself
To one, should be no family-friend at least,
A simple friar o' the city; confessed to him,
Then told how fierce temptation of release
By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,
And urged that he put this in words, write
plain
For one who could not write, set down her
prayer
That Pietro and Violante, parent-like
If somehow not her parents, should for love
Come save her, pluck from out the flame
the brand
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so
deep
To send gay-coloured sparkles up and cheer
Their seat at the chimney-corner. The good
friar
Promised as much at the moment; but, alack,
Night brings discretion: he was no one's
friend,
Yet presently found he could not turn about
Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
On someone's toe who either was a friend,
Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-
removed,
And woe to friar by whom offences come!
So, the course being plain,—with a general
sigh
At matrimony the profound mistake,—
He threw reluctantly the business up,
Having his other penitents to mind.

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,
At last she took to the open, stood and
stared
With her wan face to see where God might
wait—

And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save,—
And if they recognized in a critical flash
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,
The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself,—if this were thus?
How do you say? It were improbable;
So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia,—like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger
In the great right of an excessive wrong,—
Did somehow call this stranger and he came,—
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven—
Whatever way in this strange world it was,—
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look.

All was determined and performed at once.
And on a certain April evening, late
I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over,—she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street
Except what led to the Archbishop's door,—
Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day,—
Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse—who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain,—slid
Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room
In through the tapestries and out again
And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
And there stood, first time, last and only time,
At liberty, alone in the open street,—
Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
Broadening ever into blaze at Rome
And breaking small what long miles lay between;
Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe.

The husband quotes this for incredible,
All of the story from first word to last:
Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way,
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness;
And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy,—suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town: she witnessed all,
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage
And then told Guido the whole matter. Lies!
The woman's life confutes her word,—her word
Confutes itself: "Thus, thus and thus I lied."
"And thus, no question, still you lie," we say.

"Ay, but at last, e'en have it how you will,
"Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes
"The consummation"—the accusers shriek:
"Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
"And the companion of her flight, a priest;
"She flies her husband, he the church his spouse:
"What is this?"

Wife and priest alike reply
"This is the simple thing it claims to be,
"A course we took for life and honour's sake,
"Very strange, very justifiable."
She says, "God put it in my head to fly,
"As when the martin migrates: autumn claps
"Her hands, cries 'Winter's coming, will be here,
"'Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
"'Flee!' So I fled: this friend was the warm day,
"The south wind and whatever favours flight;
"I took the favour, had the help, how else?
"And so we did fly rapidly all night,
"All day, all night—a longer night—again,
"And then another day, longest of days,
"And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
"I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
"'Fly and arrive!' So long as I found strength
"I talked with my companion, told him much,
"Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God
"And God's disposal of me,—but the sense
"O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,
"And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
"Till at the end of that last longest night
"In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn
"And my companion whispered 'Next stage —Rome!'
"Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
"All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,
"And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said
"'But though Count Guido were a furlong off,
"'Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile!'
"Then something like a huge white wave o' the sea
"Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
"Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
"And where was I found but on a strange bed
"In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
"Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
"Who but the man you call my husband? ay—
"Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
"For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes—
"That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
"Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
"Of men who looked up in my husband's face
"To take the fate thence he should signify,
"Just as the way was at Arezzo. Then,
"Not for my sake but his who had helped me—
"I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
"The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side,
"Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
"And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
"To the wall and left him there to palpitate,
"As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—
"Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
"That he might take mine and the other lives,
"And he has done so. I submit myself!"
The priest says—oh, and in the main result
The facts asseverate, he truly says,
As to the very act and deed of him,
However you mistrust the mind o' the man—
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext
For aught except to set Pompilia free.
He says "I cite the husband's self's worst charge
"In proof of my best word for both of us.
"Be it conceded that so many times
"We took our pleasure in his palace: then,
"What need to fly at all?—or flying no less,
"What need to outrage the lips sick and white
"Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
"By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame,
Confirm her story in all points but one—
This; that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white

Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came:
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse,
She on the bed above; her friend below
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
Stood i' the red o' the morn, that she mistakes,
In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
And hurry out the horses, have the stage
Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe:
When up came Guido.
Guido's tale begins—
How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, poppied drugs
Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue: which means he took his time,
Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town,
Village and roadside, still the same report
"Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
"Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,
"While we got horses ready,—turned deaf ear
"To all entreaty they would even alight;
"Counted the minutes and resumed their course."
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,
But foil him of his captured infamy,
Prize of guilt proved and perfect? So it seemed.
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity,
Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce
A halt was, and her husband had his will.
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal-streak—
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be.
Do you see the plan deliciously complete?
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed "Take notice all the world!
"These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace,—
"The man is Caponsacchi and a priest,
"The woman is my wife: they fled me late,
"Thus have I found and you behold them thus,
"And may judge me: do you approve or no?"

Success did seem not so improbable,
But that already Satan's laugh was heard,
His black back turned on Guido—left i' the lurch
Or rather, baulked of suit and service now,
Left to improve on both by one deed more,
Burn up the better at no distant day,
Body and soul one holocaust to hell.
Anyhow, of this natural consequence
Did just the last link of the long chain snap:
For an eruption was o' the priest, alive
And alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow—
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover—who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly "I have saved your wife
"From death; there was no other way but this;
"Of what do I defraud you except death?

"Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it."
Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid
And make the best of a broken matter so.
They soon obeyed the summons—I suppose,
Apprised and ready, or not far to seek—
Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus,—
Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,
Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way,
In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door
Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet.

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd
How I see Guido taking heart again!
He knew his wife so well and the way of her—
How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn—
How, failing that, her forehead to his foot,
She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,
Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see
Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm!
No! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
I told you: would have slain him on the spot
With his own weapon, but they seized her hands:
Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
Of Guido's hope so lively late. The past
Took quite another shape now. She who shrieked
"At least and for ever I am mine and God's,
"Thanks to his liberating angel Death—
"Never again degraded to be yours
"The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
"The beast below the beast in brutishness!"—
This was the froward child, "the restif lamb
"Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned—
"Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,
"The while his fingers pushed their loving way
"Through curl on curl of that soft coat—alas,
"And she all silverly baaed gratitude
"While meditating mischief!"—and so forth.
He must invent another story now!
The ins and outs o' the rooms were searched: he found
Or showed for found the abominable prize—
Love-letters from his wife who cannot write,
Love-letters in reply o' the priest—thank God!—
Who can write and confront his character
With this, and prove the false thing forged throughout:
Spitting whereat, he needs must spatter whom
But Guido's self?—that forged and falsified
One letter called Pompilia's, past dispute:
Then why not these to make sure still more sure?

So was the case concluded then and there:
Guido preferred his charges in due form,
Called on the law to adjudicate, consigned
The accused ones to the Prefect of the place,
(Oh mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge!)
And so to his own place betook himself
After the spring that failed,—the wildcat's way.
The captured parties were conveyed to Rome;
Investigation followed here i' the court—
Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
From then to now being eight months and no more.
Guido kept out of sight and safe at home:
The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most
At words when deeds were out of question, pushed
Nearest the purple,[1] best played deputy,
So, pleaded, Guido's representative
At the court shall soon try Guido's self,—what's more,

[1] *The purple:* the colour of the cardinals.

The court that also took—I told you, Sir—
That statement of the couple, how a cheat
Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs.
That was the prelude; this, the play's first act:
Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.

Well, the result was something of a shade
On the parties thus accused,—how otherwise?
Shade, but with shine as unmistakable.
Each had a prompt defence: Pompilia first—
"Earth was made hell to me who did no harm:
"I only could emerge one way from hell
"By catching at the one hand held me, so
"I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven:
"If that be wrong, do with me what you will!"
Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep
O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off—
"If as a man, then much more as a priest
"I hold me bound to help weak innocence:
"If so my worldly reputation burst,
"Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may:
"Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness.
"But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,
"The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
"Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
"Over the pit should bury body and soul!
"His facts are lies: his letters are the fact—
"An infiltration flavoured with himself!
"As for the fancies—whether . . . what is it you say?
"The lady loves me, whether I love her
"In the forbidden sense of your surmise,—
"If, with the midday blaze of truth above,
"The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
"You needs must pry about and trace the birth
"Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,
"To the night's sun that's Lucifer himself,
"Do so, at other time, in other place,
"Not now nor here! Enough that first to last
"I never touched her lip nor she my hand
"Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
"Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear.
"Be such your question, thus I answer it."

Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke.
"It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
"Hard to believe, but not impossible:
"Who can be absolute for either side?
"A middle course is happily open yet.
"Here has a blot surprised the social blank,—
"Whether through favour, feebleness or fault,
"No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
"And we unclean must needs be purified.
"Here is a wife makes holiday from home,
"A priest caught playing truant to his church,
"In masquerade moreover: both allege
"Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
"Which else would heavily fall. On the other hand,
"Here is a husband, ay and man of mark,
"Who comes complaining here, demands redress
"As if he were the pattern of desert—
"The while those plaguy allegations frown,
"Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks.
"To all men be our moderation known!
"Rewarding none while compensating each,
"Hurting all round though harming nobody,
"Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
"Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
"From application of our excellent oil:
"So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,
"We make no miss of justice in a sort.
"First, let the husband stomach as he may,
"His wife shall neither be returned him, no—
"Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
"To a convent and the quietude she craves;
"So is he rid of his domestic plague:
"What better thing can happen to a man?
"Next, let the priest retire—unshent, unshamed,

"Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,
"But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs!)
"Sent for three years to clarify his youth
"At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome:
"There let his life skim off its last of lees
"Nor keep this dubious colour. Judged the cause:
"All parties may retire, content, we hope."
That's Rome's way, the traditional road of law;
Whither it leads is what remains to tell.

The priest went to his relegation-place,
The wife to her convent, brother Paolo
To the arms of brother Guido with the news
And this beside — his charge was counter-charged;
The Comparini, his old brace of hates,
Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now—
Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,
And followed up the pending dowry-suit
By a procedure should release the wife
From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
Escape when Guido turned the screw too much
On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may.
No more defence, she turned and made attack,
Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short:
Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,
As, proved,—and proofs seemed coming thick and fast,—
Would gain both freedom and the dowry back
Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp:
So urged the Comparini for the wife.
Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan
O' the flight and following and the rest: the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,
While he had got himself a quite new plague—
Found the world's face an universal grin

At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales[1]
Of how a young and spritely clerk devised
To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
And cured her of the vapours in a trice:
And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part,[2]
Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit
To catch the lovers, and came halting up,
Cast his net and then called the Gods to see
The convicts in their rosy impudence—
Whereat said Mercury "Would that I were Mars!"
Oh it was rare, and naughty all the same!
Brief, the wife's courage and cunning,—the priest's show
Of chivalry and adroitness,—last not least,
The husband—how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
Whose bark had promised biting; but just sneaked
Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 'twere,—
All this was hard to gulp down and digest.
So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold.
But this was at Arezzo: here in Rome
Brave Paolo bore up against it all—
Battled it out, nor wanting to himself
Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore
Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain.
He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work;
Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear
Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way
To the old Pope's self,—past decency indeed,—
Praying him take the matter in his hands
Out of the regular court's incompetence.
But times are changed and nephews out of date
And favouritism unfashionable: the Pope
Said "Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due!"
As for the Comparini's counter-plea,
He met that by a counter-plea again,
Made Guido claim divorce—with help so far

[1] *The Hundred Merry Tales:* referring to the "Decameron" of Boccaccio, in which ten tales are told on each of ten days, many of them of the type described in the next lines.

[2] *Vulcan's part:* referring to Homer (*Od.* viii. 266 ff.), where Hephæstus (Vulcan) is deceived by Aphrodite (Venus), his wife, and Ares (Mars), her lover.

By the trial's issue: for, why punishment
However slight unless for guiltiness
However slender?—and a molehill serves
Much as a mountain of offence this way.
So was he gathering strength on every side
And growing more and more to menace—when
All of a terrible moment came the blow
That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
O' the foil and brought mannaia on the stage.

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns.
This,—being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
And quote as something gained, to friends at home,—
This naturally was at Guido's charge:
Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,
Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?
So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
Like heart's blood, till—what's here? What notice comes?
The convent's self makes application bland
That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,
She may have leave to go combine her cure
Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
That want fresh air outside the convent-wall,
Say in a friendly house,—and which so fit
As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
The natural guardians? "Oh, and shift the care
"You shift the cost, too; Pietro pays in turn,
"And lightens Guido of a load! And then,
"Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
"Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
"*Domus pro carcere*[1]—nowise we relax,
"Nothing abate: how answers Paolo?" You,

[1] *Domus pro carcere:* "a house in place of a prison."

What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,
Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world.
He authorized the transfer, saw it made
And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
Having to sit down, rack his brain and find
What phrase should serve him best to notify
Our Guido that by happy providence
A son and heir, a babe was born to him
I' the villa,—go tell sympathizing friends!
Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege:
She, when she fled, was one month gone with child,
Known to herself or unknown, either way
Availing to explain (say men of art)
The strange and passionate precipitance
Of maiden startled into motherhood
Which changes body and soul by nature's law.
So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come
For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart
To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk
Contest the prize,—wherefore, she knows not yet.
Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news.
"I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive
"To take the one step left,"—wrote Paolo.
Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,
Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
With a bright bubble at the brim beside—
By an heir's birth he was assured at once
O' the main prize, all the money in dispute:
Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
Or stay with him as law's caprice should point,—
But now—now—what was Pietro's shall be hers,
What was hers shall remain her own,—if hers,
Why then,—oh, not her husband's but—her heir's!

That heir being his too, all grew his at last
By this road or by that road, since they join.
Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world,—
The current of the money stopped, you see,
Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child:
Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
Again the current of the money stopped,—
Guido debarred his rights as husband soon,
So the new process threatened;—now, the chance,
Now, the resplendent minute! Clear the earth,
Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear
A child remains, depositary of all,
That Guido may enjoy his own again,
Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
Wipe out the past, all done all left undone,
Swell the good present to best evermore,
Die into new life, which let blood baptize!

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,
Both why there was one step to take at Rome,
And why he should not meet with Paolo there,
He saw—the ins and outs to the heart of hell—
And took the straight line thither swift and sure.
He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil,
Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
That served for a soul, the looking up to him
Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
Heaven, hell,—lord paramount, assembled these,
Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod
With his will's imprint; then took horse, plied spur,
And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome
On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
Left them by Paolo, the considerate man
Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once
As if to leave the stage free. A whole week
Did Guido spend in study of his part,
Then played it fearless of a failure. One,
Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,
And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
"Good will on earth and peace to man:" but, two,
Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,
The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns
To the little lone suburban villa; knocked—
"Who may be outside?" called a well-known voice.
"A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
"A letter."
That's a test, the excusers say:
Ay, and a test conclusive, I return.
What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or taste
Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy
With memory of the sorrow just at end,—
She, happy in her parents' arms at length
With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe,—
How had that name's announcement moved the wife?
Or, as the other slanders circulate,
Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant
On nights and days whither safe harbour lured,
What bait had been i' the name to ope the door?
The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests
Have secret watchwords, private entrances:
The man's own self might have been found inside
And all the scheme made frustrate by a word.
No: but since Guido knew, none knew so well,
The man had never since returned to Rome
Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,
So, could not be at hand to warn or save,—
For that, he took this sure way to the end.

"Come in," bade poor Violante cheerfully,
Drawing the door-bolt: that death was the first,

Stabbed through and through. Pietro, close on her heels,
Set up a cry—"Let me confess myself!
"Grant but confession!" Cold steel was the grant.
Then came Pompilia's turn.
Then they escaped.
The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighbourhood.
They had forgotten just the one thing more
Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket to-wit
Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use:
So, all on foot, desperate through the dark
Reeled they like drunkards along open road,
Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles
Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,
Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,
Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,
And brought them to the prison where they lie.
The couple were laid i' the church two days ago,
And the wife lives yet by miracle.

All is told.
You hardly need ask what Count Guido says,
Since something he must say. "I own the deed—"
(He cannot choose,—but—) "I declare the same
"Just and inevitable,—since no way else
"Was left me, but by this of taking life,
"To save my honour which is more than life.
"I exercised a husband's rights." To which
The answer is as prompt—"There was no fault
"In any one o' the three to punish thus:
"Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,
"Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,
"Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors.
"You wronged and they endured wrong; yours the fault.
"Next, had endurance overpassed the mark
"And turned resentment needing remedy,—
"Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once—
"You were all blameless of the blame alleged
"And they blameworthy where you fix all blame,
"Still, why this violation of the law?
"Yourself elected law should take its course,
"Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right;
"Why, only when the balance in law's hand
"Trembles against you and inclines the way
"O' the other party, do you make protest,
"Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
"And crying 'Honour's hurt the sword must cure'?
"Aha, and so i' the middle of each suit
"Trying i' the courts,—and you had three in play
"With an appeal to the Pope's self beside,—
"What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs,
"Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit?"

That were too temptingly commodious, Count!
One would have still a remedy in reserve
Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see!
One's honour forsooth? Does that take hurt alone
From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,
Being yet sensitive in my degree
As Guido,—must discover hurt elsewhere
Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,
May profitably break out now afresh,
Need cure from my own expeditious hands.
The lie that was, as it were, imputed me
When you objected to my contract's clause,—
The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,
When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,
To my administration of effects,
—Aha, do you think law disposed of these?
My honour's touched and shall deal death around!
Count, that were too commodious, I repeat!
If any law be imperative on us all,
Of all are you the enemy: out with you
From the common light and air and life of man!

IV.—TERTIUM QUID.

TRÛE, Excellency—as his Highness says,
Though she's not dead yet, she's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two;
Though he's not judged yet, he's the same as judged,
So do the facts abound and superabound:
And nothing hinders that we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Nay, edge in an authoritative word
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome.
"Now for the Trial!" they roar: "the Trial to test
"The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
"I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam!"
Law's a machine from which, to please the mob,
Truth the divinity must needs descend
And clear things at the play's fifth act—aha!
Hammer into their noddles who was who
And what was what. I tell the simpletons
"Could law be competent to such a feat
"'Twere done already: what begins next week
"Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
"Whereof the first was forged three years ago
"When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
"And proved so slow in taking the first step
"That ever some new grievance,—tort, retort,
"On one or the other side,—o'ertook i' the game,
"Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
"Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
"Crammed to the edge with cargo—or passengers?
"'*Trecentos inseris*:[1] *ohe, jam satis est!*
"'*Huc appelle!*'—passengers, the word must be."

Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes.
To hear the rabble and brabble, you'd call the case
Fused and confused past human finding out.
One calls the square round, t'other the round square—
And pardonably in that first surprise
O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram:
But now we've used our eyes to the violent hue
Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines?
It makes a man despair of history,
Eusebius and the established fact—fig's end!
Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
With the leash of lawyers, two on either side—
One barks, one bites,—Masters Arcangeli
And Spreti,—that's the husband's ultimate hope
Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
Bound to do barking for the wife: bow—wow!
Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
Would settle the matter as sufficiently
As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
And Judge the Other, with even—a word and a wink—
We well know who for ultimate arbiter.
Let us beware o' the basset-table[2]—lest
We jog the elbow of Her Eminence,[3]
Jostle his cards,—he'll rap you out a . . . st!
By the window-seat! And here's the Marquis too!
Indulge me but a moment: if I fail
—Favoured with such an audience, understand!—
To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man!

The mob,—now, that's just how the error comes!
Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*,
The commonalty; this is an episode

[1] *Trecentos inseris*, &c.: Horace, *Sat.* I. 5. 12.

[2] *Basset:* a game of cards, fashionable in the seventeenth century.

[3] *Her Eminence:* an imitation of the Italian idiom, in which "His Eminence," as we should say, becomes "Sua Eminenza." Browning uses this idiom occasionally in the present book (*e.g.*, ll. 1632, 1634), but not regularly.

In burgess-life,—why seek to aggrandize,
Idealize, denaturalize the class?
People talk just as if they had to do
With a noble pair that . . . Excellency,
your ear!
Stoop to me, Highness,—listen and look
yourselves!
This Pietro, this Violante, live their life
At Rome in the easy way that's far from worst
Even for their betters,—themselves love
themselves,
Spend their own oil in feeding their own
lamp
That their own faces may grow bright thereby.
They get to fifty and over: how's the lamp?
Full to the depth o' the wick,—moneys so
much;
And also with a remnant,—so much more
Of moneys,—which there's no consuming
now,
But, when the wick shall moulder out some
day,
Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs,
Will lie a prize for the passer-by,—to-wit
Anyone that can prove himself the heir,
Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child:
Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad
bowl
O' the middle rank,—not raised a beacon's
height
For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp
graze ground
Like cresset, mudlarks poke now here now
there,
Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the
road
Or fish the luck o' the puddle. Pietro's soul
Was satisfied when cronies smirked, "No
wine
"Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day!"
His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed
its fill
When neighbours turned heads wistfully at
church,
Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.
Well, having got through fifty years of flare,
They burn out so, indulge so their dear
selves,

That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
As he were any lordling of us all:
And, now that dark begins to creep on day,
Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside,
Take counsel, then importune all at once.
For if the good fat rosy careless man,
Who has not laid a ducat by, decease—
Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch—
Why, being childless, there's a spilth i' the
street
O' the remnant, there's a scramble for the
dregs
By the stranger: so, they grant him no long
day
But come in a body, clamour to be paid.

What's his resource? He asks and straight
obtains
The customary largess, dole dealt out
To, what we call our "poor dear shame-
faced ones,"
In secret once a month to spare the shame
O' the slothful and the spendthrift,—pauper-
saints
The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens
they,
And providence he—just what the mob
admires!
That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that
falls
And gracious puts it in the vermin's way.
Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
He must be subsidized at our expense:
And for his wife—the harmless household
sheep
One ought not to see harassed in her age—
Judge, by the way she bore adversity,
O' the patient nature you ask pity for!
How long, now, would the roughest market-
man,
Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,
Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep
here,
Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,

In her first difficulty showed great teeth
Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime.
She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase,
These funds that only want an heir to take—
Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
By semitones from whine to snarl high up
And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys,—
Pauses with a little compunction for the face
Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer,—
Never a bottle now for friend at need,—
Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
And neighbourly condolences thereat,
Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do:
And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,
Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,
Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed,
Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
Blinking at top,—the sign of we know what,—
One candle in a casement set to wink
Streetward, do service to no shrine inside,—
Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs,
Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
Raps, opens, enters in: up starts a thing
Naked as needs be—"What, you rogue, 'tis you?
"Back,—how can I have taken a farthing yet?
"Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am!
"Here's . . . why, I took you for Madonna's self
"With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place!
"What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame?"
Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure?
One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
By another vile one: her ostensible work
Was washing clothes, out in the open air
At the cistern by Citorio; her true trade—
Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
The ankles she let liberally shine
In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
That there was plenty more to criticize
At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
Decorously above, and all was done
I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside.
Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
Tracked her home to her house-top, noted too,
And now was come to tempt her and propose
A bargain far more shameful than the first
Which trafficked her virginity away
For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.
Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end—
"Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
"Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be;
"I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
"Paying beside for mass to make all straight:
"Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece."

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
From her own brain, self-lit by such success,—
Gains church in time for the "*Magnificat*"
And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,
"And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"
So that the officiating priest turns round
To see who proffers the obstreperous praise:
Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much
But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news—
How orisons and works of charity,
(Beside that pair of pinners and a coif,
Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life,—
They, or the Orvieto in a double dose.

Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
And the result was like to be an heir.

Accordingly, when time was come about,
He found himself the sire indeed of this
Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day.
A crime complete in its way is here, I hope?
Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
To nature and civility and the mode:
Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
O' the due succession,—and, what followed thence,
Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear
Debarred the most note-worthy incident
When all else done and undone twelve-month through
Was put in evidence at Easter-time.
All other peccadillos!—but this one
To the priest who comes next day to dine with us?
'Twere inexpedient; decency forbade.

Is so far clear? You know Violante now,
Compute her capability of crime
By this authentic instance? Black hard cold
Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot
I' the middle of a field?

I thought as much.
But now, a question,—how long does it lie,
The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
Before encroached on and encompassed round
With minute moss, weed, wild-flower—made alive
By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
Your Highness,—healthy minds let bygones be,
Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
I' the sun and air; so time treats ugly deeds:
They take the natural blessing of all change.
There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth,
The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
Virtues to right and left, profusely paid
If so they might compensate the saved sin.
And then the sudden existence, dewy-dear,
O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
As good as new created, since withdrawn
From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
With the unknown father and the mother known
Too well,—some fourteen years of squalid youth,
And then libertinage, disease, the grave—
Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell:
Look at that horror and this soft repose!
Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul!
Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs—
'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
And robbing a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,
How did you get that marvel of a gem,
The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek?
The story is, stooping to pick a stone
From the pathway through a vineyard—no-man's-land—
To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this:
Why, now, do those five clowns o' the family
O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse
That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
To do flint's-service with the tinder-box?
Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend,
But are you so hard on who jostles just
A stranger with no natural sort of claim
To the havings and the holdings (here's the point)
Unless by misadventure, and defect
Of that which ought to be—nay, which there's none
Would dare so much as wish to profit by—
Since who dares put in just so many words
"May Pietro fail to have a child, please God!

"So shall his house and goods belong to me,
"The sooner that his heart will pine betimes"?
Well then, God doesn't please, nor heart shall pine!
Because he has a child at last, you see,
Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,
He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think:
If he accepts it why should you demur?

Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
The proper process of unsinning sin
Is to begin well-doing somehow else.
Pietro,—remember, with no sin at all
I' the substitution,—why, this gift of God
Flung in his lap from over Paradise
Steadied him in a moment, set him straight
On the good path he had been straying from.
Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
Cuppings, carousings,—these a sponge wiped out.
All sort of self-denial was easy now
For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be,
Who must want much and might want who knows what?
And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.
As for the wife,—I said, hers the whole sin:
So, hers the exemplary penance. 'Twas a text
Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through:
"Oh, make us happy and you make us good!
"It all comes of God giving her a child:
"Such graces follow God's best earthly gift!"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart
By the home-thrust—"There's a lie at base of all."
Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck?
That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
A fish secreted round a grain of grit!
Do you call it worthless for the worthless core?
(She doesn't, who well knows what she changed for it.)
So, to our brace of burgesses again!

You see so far i' the story, who was right,
Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?
Eh? Well, admit there's somewhat dark i' the case,
Let's on—the rest shall clear, I promise you.
Leap over a dozen years: you find, these past,
An old good easy creditable sire,
A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,
The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown
Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock
To bow its white miraculous birth of buds
I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse,—
So painters fancy: here it was a fact.
And this their lily,—could they but transplant
And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch
'Twixt lion and lion!—this Pompilia of theirs,
Could they see worthily married, well bestowed,
In house and home! And why despair of this
With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?
Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,
Throw their late savings in a common heap
To go with the dowry, and be followed in time
By the heritage legitimately hers:
And when such paragon was found and fixed,
Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis*" straight.

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,
Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
And social class should choose among, these cits.
Yet there's a latitude: exceptional white
Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
A burgess nearly an aristocrat,
Legitimately in reach: look out for him!
What banker, merchant, has seen better days,
What second-rate painter a-pushing up,
Poet a-slipping down, shall bid the best
For this young beauty with the thumping purse?

Alack, were it but one of such as these
So like the real thing that they pass for it,
All had gone well! Unluckily, poor souls,
It proved to be the impossible thing itself,
Truth and not sham: hence ruin to them all.

For, Guido Franceschini was the head
Of an old family in Arezzo, old
To that degree they could afford be poor
Better than most: the case is common too.
Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
To cater for the week,—turns up anon
I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb:
Then back again with prize,—a liver begged
Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked.
He's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
Point pictures out have hung their hundred years,
"Priceless," he tells you,—puts in his place at once
The man of money: yes, you're banker-king
Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
While patron, the house-master, can't afford
To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots:
But he's the man of mark, and there's his shield,
And yonder's the famed Rafael, first in kind,
The painter painted for his grandfather,
And you have paid to see: "Good morning, Sir!"
Such is the law of compensation. Still
The poverty was getting nigh acute;
There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,
Beans must suffice unflavoured of the fowl.
The mother,—hers would be a spun-out life
I' the nature of things; the sisters had done well
And married men of reasonable rank:
But that sort of illumination stops,
Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth.
The family instinct felt out for its fire
To the Church,—the Church traditionally helps
A second son: and such was Paolo,
Established here at Rome these thirty years,
Who played the regular game,—priest and Abate,
Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
To a personage: his course lay clear enough.
The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,
And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so
Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope.
Even our Guido, eldest brother, went
As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,
He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive,—
So, could but dally with an Order or two
And testify good-will i' the cause: he clipped
His top-hair and thus far affected Christ.
But main promotion must fall otherwise,
Though still from the side o' the Church: and here was he
At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is —"Wait!"
When one day,—he too having his Cardinal
To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads,—
The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
Ride with one plume the less; and off it dropped.

Guido thus left,—with a youth spent in vain
And not a penny in purse to show for it,—
Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
"Where is the good I came to get at Rome?
"Where the repayment of the servitude

"To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
"Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine?"
"Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant—
"You have not had, so far, the proper luck,
"Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both:
"A modest competency is mine, not more.
"You are the Count however, yours the style,
"Heirdom and state,—you can't expect all good.
"Had I, now, held your hand of cards . . . well, well—
"What's yet unplayed, I'll look at, by your leave,
"Over your shoulder,—I who made my game,
"Let's see, if I can't help to handle yours.
"Fie on you, all the Honours in your fist,
"Countship, Householdship,—how have you misdealt!
"Why, in the first place, these will marry a man!
"*Notum tonsoribus!*[1] To the Tonsor then!
"Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,
"And, after function's done with, down we go
"To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench
"I and some others settled in the shop
"At Place Colonna: she's an oracle. Hmm!
"'Dear, 'tis my brother: brother, 'tis my dear.
"'Dear, give us counsel! Whom do you suggest
"'As properest party in the quarter round
"'For the Count here?—he is minded to take wife,
"'And further tells me he intends to slip
"'Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp
"'Of his old wig when he sends it to revive
"'For the wedding: and I add a trifle too.
"'You know what personage I'm potent with.'"
And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first.
She told them of the household and its ways,
The easy husband and the shrewder wife
In Via Vittoria,—how the tall young girl,
With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big
As yon pomander to make freckles fly,
Would have so much for certain, and so much more
In likelihood,—why, it suited, slipped as smooth
As the Pope's pantoufle does on the Pope's foot.
"I'll to the husband!" Guido ups and cries.
"Ay, so you'd play your last court-card, no doubt!"
Puts Paolo in with a groan—"Only, you see,
"'Tis I, this time, that supervise your lead.
"Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers—why?
"These play with men and take them off our hands.
"Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
"Or rather this sleek young-old barberess?
"Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
"Of Her Efficacity my Cardinal
"For an hour,—he likes to have lord-suitors lounge,—
"While I betake myself to the grey mare,
"The better horse,—how wise the people's word!—
"And wait on Madam Violante."

Said and done.
He was at Via Vittoria in three skips:
Proposed at once to fill up the one want
O' the burgess-family which, wealthy enough,
And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched
Outside a gate to heaven,—locked, bolted, barred,
Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept
Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand
Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence.
The key was fairy; its mere mention made
Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray
That reached the womanly heart: so—"I assent!
"Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key
"To all the glories of the greater life!
"There's Pietro to convince: leave that to me!"

Then was the matter broached to Pietro; then

[1] *Notum tonsoribus:* "known to the barbers." See note on II. 115.

Did Pietro make demand and get response
That in the Countship was a truth, but in
The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie.
He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,
Declined the honour. Then the wife wiped tear,
Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,
Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve,
Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
And finally begged pardon at the feet
Of her dear lord and master. Whereupon
Quoth Pietro—"Let us make the best of things!"
"I knew your love would license us," quoth she:
Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,
"These be the tools wherewith priests manage men."

Now, here take breath and ask,—which bird o' the brace
Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who
Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance.
There was a bargain mentally proposed
On each side, straight and plain and fair enough;
Mind knew its own mind: but when mind must speak,
The bargain have expression in plain terms,
There came the blunder incident to words,
And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul.
The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
Were just—"I Guido truck my name and rank
"For so much money and youth and female charms.—
"We Pietro and Violante give our child
"And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
Such naked truth while chambered in the brain
Shocks nowise: walk it forth by way of tongue,—
Out on the cynical unseemliness!
Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
To serve as decent wrappage: so, Guido gives
Money for money,—and they, bride for groom,
Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.
According to the words, each cheated each;
But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,
Each did give and did take the thing designed,
The rank on this side and the cash on that—
Attained the object of the traffic, so.
The way of the world, the daily bargain struck
In the first market! Why sells Jack his ware?
"For the sake of serving an old customer."
Why does Jill buy it? "Simply not to break
"A custom, pass the old stall the first time."
Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange:
Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in.
Don't be too hard o' the pair! Had each pretence
Been simultaneously discovered, stript
From off the body o' the transaction, just
As when a cook (will Excellency forgive?)
Strips away those long rough superfluous legs
From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
(With your respect, Prince!)—balance had been kept,
No party blamed the other,—so, starting fair,
All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
Had followed on equal terms. But, as it chanced,
One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
Of the other first and kept its own concealed:
And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair.
'Twas foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
"We are cheated!"

Such unprofitable noise
Angers at all times: but when those who plague,
Do it from inside your own house and home,
Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,

Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.
The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame
Unfairly,—worsened that first bad of his,
By practising all kinds of cruelty
To oust them and suppress the wail and whine,—
That speedily he so scared and bullied them,
Fain were they, long before five months had passed,
To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
Just so much as would help them back to Rome
Where, when they finished paying the last doit
O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door.
So say the Comparini—as if it came
Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,
That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,
Confessed her substitution of the child
Whence all the harm fell,—and that Pietro first
Bethought him of advantage to himself
I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
For all miscalculation in the pact.

On the other hand "Not so!" Guido retorts—
"I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
"Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,
"Which was, is, cannot but continue gain.
"My being poor was a bye-circumstance,
"Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
"Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
"Or uncle die and leave me his estate.
"You should have put up with the minor flaw,
"Getting the main prize of the jewel. If wealth,
"Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
"Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy
"O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest,
"It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
"And made a life in common impossible.
"Show me the stipulation of our bond
"That you should make your profit of being inside
"My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same,
"First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
"Then round us in the ears from morn to night
"(Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
"That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
"You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,
"Pay for your own miscalculation too:
"You thought nobility, gained at any price,
"Would suit and satisfy,—find the mistake,
"And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me.
"And how? By telling me, i' the face of the world,
"I it is have been cheated all this while,
"Abominably and irreparably,—my name
"Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
"A beggar's bye-blow,—thus depriving me
"Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole
"Aim on my part i' the marriage,—money to-wit.
"This thrust I have to parry by a guard
"Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust
"On the other side,—no way but there's a pass
"Clean through me. If I prove, as I hope to do,
"There's not one truth in this your odious tale
"O' the buying, selling, substituting—prove
"Your daughter was and is your daughter,—well,
"And her dowry hers and therefore mine,—what then?
"Why, where's the appropriate punishment for this
"Enormous lie hatched for mere malice' sake
"To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?
"And if I try revenge for remedy,
"Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?"

I anticipate however—only ask,
Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!

Which brownness is least black,—decide who can,
Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,
Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave
The question at this stage, proceed to the next,
Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,
In the eye o' the world? They brandish law 'gainst law;
The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,
Than the very wounds that follow. Beside the tale
Which the Comparini have to re-assert,
They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
The straitnesses of Guido's household life—
The petty nothings we bear privately
But break down under when fools flock to jeer.
What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food?
That's one more wrong than needs.

On the other hand,
Guido,—whose cue is to dispute the truth
O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him,—
He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
And welcome, we allow. Ay, but he can't!
He's at home, only acts by proxy here:
Law may meet law,—but all the gibes and jeers,
The superfluity of naughtiness,
Those libels on his House,—how reach at them?
Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow,
Not only make parade of spoil they filched,
But foul him from the height of a tower, you see.
Unluckily temptation is at hand—
To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,
Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
Will strike the grinners grave: his wife remains
Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
Never a mile away from mother's house
And petted to the height of her desire,
Was told one morning that her fate had come,
She must be married—just as, a month before,
Her mother told her she must comb her hair
And twist her curls into one knot behind.
These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,
Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake
Out of the bower into the butchery.
Plague her, he plagues them threefold: but how plague?
The world may have its word to say to that:
You can't do some things with impunity.
What remains . . . well, it is an ugly thought . . .
But that he drive herself to plague herself—
Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
Who seek to disgrace Guido?

There's the clue
To what else seems gratuitously vile,
If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
Was tried upon Pompilia: 'twas to wrench
Her limbs into exposure that brings shame.
The aim o' the cruelty being so cruellerstill,
That cruelty almost grows compassion's self
Could one attribute it to mere return
O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong.
They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
Not to vex just a body they held dear,
But blacken too a soul they boasted white,
And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
No matter how driven thither,—so they say.

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
And Guido lacks not an apologist.
The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,

Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more :
—Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought else,
And brought about the marriage ; good proved bad,
As little they cared for her its victim—nay,
Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,
If haply they might wriggle themselves free.
They baited their own hook to catch a fish
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.
Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
Had all been honesty on either side,
A common sincere effort to good end,
Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince !
—Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,
A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
Forty-six years old,—place the two grown one,
She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
In a strange town with no familiar face—
He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
If need were, free from challenge, much less check
To an irritated, disappointed will—
How evolve happiness from such a match ?
'Twere hard to serve up a congenial dish
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,
Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet !
But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess
With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung—
Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
Kith, kin and generation, shake all slab
At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,
That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,
Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow—
Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
What wonder if this?—the compound plague o' the pair
Pricked Guido,—not to take the course they hoped,
That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
Accept its obvious promise of relief,
And thrust them out of doors the girl again
Since the girl's dowry would not enter there,
—Quit of the one if baulked of the other : no !
Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
Their product proved the horrible conceit
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,
And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,
Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
Their triumph in her misery and death.

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch
O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit ;
Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust :
Allow that such an one may take revenge,
You don't expect he'll catch up stone and fling,
Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff?
Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife,—
Substitute for the clown a nobleman,
And you have Guido, practising, 'tis said,
Immitigably from the very first,
The finer vengeance : this, they say, the fact
O' the famous letter shows—the writing traced
At Guido's instance by the timid wife
Over the pencilled words himself writ first—
Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
Was made unblushingly declare a tale
To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,
How her putative parents had impressed,

On their departure, their enjoinment; bade
"We being safely arrived here, follow, you!
"Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
"And then by means o' the gallant you procure
"With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,
"Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
"You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
"Where we may live like flies in honey-pot:"—
Such being exact the programme of the course
Imputed her as carried to effect.

They also say,—to keep her straight therein,
All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
On either side Pompilia's path of life,
Built round about and over against by fear,
Circumvallated month by month, and week
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven,
Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap.
She, they say further, first tried every chink,
Every imaginable break i' the fire,
As way of escape: ran to the Commissary,
Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse;
Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet,
Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
And then took up the slight load from the ground
And bore it back for husband to chastise,—
Mildly of course,—but natural right is right.
So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,
Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,
Who heard her story in confession, wept,
Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.
"Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world?
"I cannot even write my woes, nor put
"My prayer for help in words a friend may read,—
"I no more own a coin than have an hour
"Free of observance,—I was watched to church,
"Am watched now, shall be watched back presently,—
"How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
"Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
"O' the need I have my parents take me hence!"
The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose—
Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over: she went back, heaven in heart.
Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best:
"Here am I, foolish body that I be,
"Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
"My betters their plain duty,—what, I dare
"Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
"Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
"What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
"For proper dispensation? So a fool
"Once touched the ark,—poor Uzzah that I am!
"Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
"In patience all of ye possess your souls!
"This life is brief and troubles die with it:
"Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.
Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, "This way,

"Out by me! Hesitate one moment more
"And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!
"Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon
She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.
Whose fault or shame but Guido's?—ask her friends.

But then this is the wife's—Pompilia's tale—
Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,
Was hardly fallen (our candour might pronounce)
When simply saying in her own defence
"The serpent tempted me and I did eat."
So much of paradisal nature, Eve's!
Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
"Adam so starved me I was fain accept
"The apple any serpent pushed my way."
What an elaborate theory have we here,
Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously
Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
To account for the thawing of an icicle,
Show us there needed Ætna vomit flame
Ere run the crystal into dew-drops! Else,
How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,
How could a married lady go astray?
Bless the fools! And 'tis just this way they are blessed,
And the world wags still,—because fools are sure
—Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No!
But of their own: the case is altered quite.
Look now,—last week, the lady we all love,—
Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
Wife of the husband we all cap before,
Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on,—
Was caught in converse with a negro page.
Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it—
"Why?" asked and echoed the fools. "Because, you fools,—"
So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
With that fine candour only forthcoming
When 'tis no odds whether withheld or no—
"Because my husband was the saint you say,
"And,—with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
"Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise,—
"Saint to you, insupportable to me.
"Had he,—instead of calling me fine names,
"Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,
"And curtaining Correggio carefully
"Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs,—
"—But once never so little tweaked my nose
"For peeping through my fan at Carnival,
"Confessing thereby 'I have no easy task—
"'I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
"'And then,—why 'tis so doubtful if they serve,
"'That—take this, as an earnest of despair!'
"Why, we were quits: I had wiped the harm away,
"Thought 'The man fears me!' and foregone revenge."
We must not want all this elaborate work
To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!

Accordingly one word on the other side
Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale.
Guido says—that is, always, his friends say—
It is unlikely, from the wickedness,
That any man treat any woman so.
The letter in question was her very own,
Unprompted and unaided: she could write—
As able to write as ready to sin, or free,
When there was danger, to deny both facts.
He bids you mark, herself from first to last
Attributes all the so-styled torture just
To jealousy,—jealousy of whom but just
This very Caponsacchi! How suits here
This with the other alleged motive, Prince?
Would Guido make a terror of the man
He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge?
Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare?
Consider too, the charge was made and met

At the proper time and place where proofs were plain—
Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop
For the gospel: which acknowledged primacies,
'Tis impudently pleaded, he could warp
Into a tacit partnership with crime—
He being the while, believe their own account,
Impotent, penniless and miserable!
He further asks — Duke, note the knotty point!—
How he,—concede him skill to play such part
And drive his wife into a gallant's arms,—
Could bring the gallant to play his part too
And stand with arms so opportunely wide?
How bring this Caponsacchi,—with whom, friends
And foes alike agree, throughout his life
He never interchanged a civil word
Nor lifted courteous cap to—him how bend
To such observancy of beck and call,
—To undertake this strange and perilous feat
For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,
Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
Beyond sight in a public theatre,
When she wrote letters (she that could not write!)
The importunate shamelessly-protested love
Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
Under abysmal black: a priest contrive
No better, no amour to be hushed up,
But open flight and noon-day infamy?
Try and concoct defence for such revolt!
Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged,—
Pray, in what rubric of the breviary
Do you find it registered—the part of a priest
Is—that to right wrongs from the church he skip,
Go journeying with a woman that's a wife,
And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . . how?
In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel
Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)
And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!
Could no one else be found to serve at need—
No woman—or if man, no safer sort
Than this not well-reputed turbulence?

Then, look into his own account o' the case!
He, being the stranger and astonished one,
Yet received protestations of her love
From lady neither known nor cared about:
Love, so protested, bred in him disgust
After the wonder,—or incredulity,
Such impudence seeming impossible.
But, soon assured such impudence might be,
When he had seen with his own eyes at last
Letters thrown down to him i' the very street
From behind lattice where the lady lurked,
And read their passionate summons to her side—
Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in,—
How he had seen her once, a moment's space,
Observed she was both young and beautiful,
Heard everywhere report she suffered much
From a jealous husband thrice her age,—in short
There flashed the propriety, expediency
Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
—At all events, granting the interview
Prayed for, one so adapted to assist
Decision as to whether he advance,
Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood!
Therefore the interview befell at length;
And at this one and only interview,
He saw the sole and single course to take—
Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
Did her behest and braved the consequence,
Not for the natural end, the love of man
For woman whether love be virtue or vice,
But, please you, altogether for pity's sake—
Pity of innocence and helplessness!
And how did he assure himself of both?
Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,

Eye-witness of the described martyrdom,
So, competent to pronounce its remedy
Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course—
Involving such enormity of harm,
Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
And damned without a word in his defence?
Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here,
—Process which saves a world of trouble and time.
There's the priest's story: what do you say to it,
Trying its truth by your own instinct too,
Since that's to be the expeditious mode?
"And now, do hear my version," Guido cries:
"I accept argument and inference both.
"It would indeed have been miraculous
"Had such a confidency sprung to birth
"With no more fanning from acquaintanceship
"Than here avowed by my wife and this priest.
"Only, it did not: you must substitute
"The old stale unromantic way of fault,
"The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
"In prose form with the unpoetic tricks,
"Cheatings and lies: they used the hackney chair
"Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,
"No gilded gimcrack-novelty from below,
"To bowl you along thither, swift and sure.
"That same officious go-between, the wench
"Who gave and took the letters of the two,
"Now offers self and service back to me:
"Bears testimony to visits night by night
"When all was safe, the husband far and away,—
"To many a timely slipping out at large
"By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake.
"And when the fugitives were found at last,
"Why, with them were found also, to belie
"What protest they might make of innocence,
"All documents yet wanting, if need were,
"To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me—
"The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
"To culmination in this outrage: read!
"Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife,—
"Here they are, read and say where they chime in
"With the other tale, superlative purity
"O' the pair of saints! I stand or fall by these."

But then on the other side again,—how say
The pair of saints? That not one word is theirs—
No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent
Or yet received by either of the two.
"Found," says the priest, "because he needed them,
"Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault:
"So, here they are, just as is natural.
"Oh yes—we had our missives, each of us!
"Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt:
"Hers as from me,—she could not read, so burnt,—
"Mine as from her,—I burnt because I read.
"Who forged and found them? *Cui profuerint!*"[1]
(I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth)
"He who would gain by her fault and my fall,
"The trickster, schemer and pretender—he
"Whose whole career was lie entailing lie
"Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last!"

Guido rejoins—"Did the other end o' the tale
"Match this beginning! 'Tis alleged I prove
"A murderer at the end, a man of force
"Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual: good!
"Then what need all this trifling woman's-work,
"Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,

[1] *Cui profuerint:* "he who would profit by them?"

"When will and power were mine to end at once
"Safely and surely? Murder had come first
"Not last with such a man, assure yourselves!
"The silent *acquetta*,[1] stilling at command—
"A drop a day i' the wine or soup, the dose,—
"The shattering beam that breaks above the bed
"And beats out brains, with nobody to blame
"Except the wormy age which eats even oak,—
"Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord,—who cares
"I' the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,
"With none to see, much more to interpose
"O' the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things
"Born mine and bred mine? Had I willed gross death,
"I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey
"Than this that goes meandering here and there
"Through half the world and calls down in its course
"Notice and noise,—hate, vengeance, should it fail,
"Derision and contempt though it succeed!
"Moreover, what o' the future son and heir?
"The unborn babe about to be called mine,—
"What end in heaping all this shame on him,
"Were I indifferent to my own black share?
"Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
"Willing and able to effect the straight?"

"Ay, would you!"—one may hear the priest retort,
"Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile,
"And ruffianism but an added graft.
"You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,

[1] *Acquetta:* a kind of slow poison.

"Trick and chicane,—and only when these fail
"Does violence follow, and like fox you bite
"Caught out in stealing. Also, the disgrace
"You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her:
"You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame
"Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
"Held them a second there, then drew out both
"—Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and through.
"Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch—
"Namely, succession to the inheritance
"Which bolder crime had lost you: let things change,
"The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime,
"Why, murder was determined, dared and done.
"For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,
"The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
"All were against me,—that, I knew the first:
"But, knowing also what my duty was,
"I did it: I must look to men more skilled
"In reading hearts than ever was the world."

Highness, decide! Pronounce, Her Excellency!
Or . . . even leave this argument in doubt,
Account it a fit matter, taken up
With all its faces, manifold enough,
To ponder on—what fronts us, the next stage,
Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,
Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
Caused both to be arrested then and there
And sent to Rome for judgment on the case—
Thither, with all his armoury of proofs,
Betook himself: 'tis there we'll meet him now,
Waiting the further issue.
Here you smile
"And never let him henceforth dare to plead,—

"Of all pleas and excuses in the world
"For any deed hereafter to be done,—
"His irrepressible wrath at honour's wound!
"Passion and madness irrepressible? 1130
"Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
"And catches foe i' the very act of shame!
"There's man to man,—nature must have her way,—
"We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
"Yes, then, indeed—even tho' it prove he erred— 1135
"Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
"Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,
"Still,—had he slain the lover and the wife—
"Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
"Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin
"Or at best left no more of an attire 1141
"Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,
"Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
"As passport to the Paphos[1] fit for such,
"Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews,— 1145
"Good! One had recognized the power o' the pulse.
"But when he stands, the stock-fish,—sticks to law—
"Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,
"For scrivener's pen to poke and play about—
"Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps, 1150
"Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage!
"Such rage were a convenient afterthought
"For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
"Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
"Had but the priest been found, as was to hope, 1155
"In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword:
"Whereas the grey innocuous grub, of yore,
"Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,

[1] *Paphos:* Paphos, in Cyprus, was the headquarters of the worship of Aphrodite, which was there accompanied by licentious rites and practices.

"The priest was metamorphosed into knight.
"And even the timid wife, whose cue was—shriek, 1160
"Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot,—
"She too sprang at him like a pythoness:
"So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
"Calm be the word! Well, our word is—we brand
"This part o' the business, howsoever the rest
"Befall." 1166
"Nay," interpose as prompt his friends—
"This is the world's way! So you adjudge reward
"To the forbearance and legality
"Yourselves begin by inculcating—ay, 1170
"Exacting from us all with knife at throat!
"This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount,—
"You publish all, with the kind comment here,
"'Its victim was too cowardly for revenge.'"
Make it your own case,—you who stand apart!
The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep, 1176
With a taste of poppy in his mouth,—rubs eyes,
Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too,
Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end.
You bid him use his privilege: well, it seems
He's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move— 1181
Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands
Bewildered at the critical minute,—since
He has the first flash of the fact alone 1184
To judge from, act with, not the steady lights
Of after-knowledge,—yours who stand at ease
To try conclusions: he's in smother and smoke,
You outside, with explosion at an end:
The sulphur may be lightning or a squib—
He'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts. 1190
Back from what you know to what he knew not!
Hear the priest's lofty "I am innocent,"
The wife's as resolute "You are guilty!"
Come!

Are you not staggered?—pause, and you lose the move!
Nought left you but a low appeal to law,
"Coward" tied to your tail for compliment!
Another consideration: have it your way!
Admit the worst: his courage failed the Count,
He's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
He's grown incorporate with,—a very cur,
Kick him from out your circle by all means!
Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in,
And the Court-porch also: in he sneaks to each,—
"Yes, I have lost my honour and my wife,
"And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
"I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,
"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"
Ay,
Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,
But punish should he dare do otherwise.
If the case be clear or turbid,—you must say!

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage
In the law-courts,—let's see clearly from this point!—
Where the priest tells his story true or false,
And the wife her story, and the husband his,
All with result as happy as before.
The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit
This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense
As end the strife to either's absolute loss:
Pronounced, in place of something definite,
"Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep
"I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide.
"Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
"Of pains enough,—even though no worse were proved.
"Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife
"Without provoking her to scream and scratch
"And scour the fields,—causelessly, it may be:
"Here is that wife,—who makes her sex our plague,
"Wedlock, our bugbear,—perhaps with cause enough:
"And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst
"Or best—each quality being conceivable.
"Let us impose a little mulct on each.
"We punish youth in state of pupilage
"Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,
"Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose
"Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican:
"'Tis talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,
"I' the dormitory where to talk at all,
"Transgresses, and is mulct: as here we mean.
"For the wife,—let her betake herself, for rest,
"After her run, to a House of Convertites—
"Keep there, as good as real imprisonment:
"Being sick and tired, she will recover so.
"For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds,
"Who made Arezzo hot to hold him,—Rome
"Profits by his withdrawal from the scene.
"Let him be relegate to Civita,
"Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend:
"There he at least lies out o' the way of harm
"From foes—perhaps from the too friendly fair.
"And finally for the husband, whose rash rule
"Has but itself to blame for this ado,—
"If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,
"He fails obtain what he accounts his right,
"Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,
"That, turn each sentence howsoever he may,
"There's satisfaction to extract therefrom.
"For, does he wish his wife proved innocent?
"Well, she's not guilty, he may safely urge,
"Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure—
"This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more.
"Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise

"Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,
"Prevented intercourse with the outside world,
"And that suspected priest in banishment,
"Whose portion is a further help i' the case?
"Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,
"The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete,—
"Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke
"With full release from the false wife, to boot,
"And heading, hanging for the priest, beside—
"Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,
"Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,
"Amends for the past, release for the future! Such
"Is wisdom to the children of this world;
"But we've no mind, we children of the light,
"To miss the advantage of the golden mean,
"And push things to the steel point." Thus the courts.

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed,
Console yourselves: 'tis like . . . an in- . stance, now!
You've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play,—
Punch and his mate,—how threats pass, blows are dealt,
And a crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss
Accordingly as disposed for man or wife—
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim
Best suits the next adventure, new effect:
And,—by the time the mob is on the move,
With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*,—
There's a whistle, up again the actors pop
In t'other tatter with fresh-tinseled staves,
To re-engage in one last worst fight more
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.
Note, that the climax and the crown of things
Invariably is, the devil appears himself,
Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail!
Just so, nor otherwise it proved—you'll see:
Move to the murder, never mind the rest!

Guido, at such a general duck-down,
I' the breathing-space,—of wife to convent here,
Priest to his relegation, and himself
To Arezzo,—had resigned his part perforce
To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,
Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits—
Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law
Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse:
First civil suit,—the one the parents brought,
Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,
Affirming thence the nullity of her rights:
This was before the Rota,—Molinès,
That's judge there, made that notable decree
Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said,—
But Pietro had appealed against the same
To the very court will judge what we judge now—
Tommati and his fellows,—Suit the first.
Next civil suit,—demand on the wife's part
Of separation from the husband's bed
On plea of cruelty and risk to life—
Claims restitution of the dowry paid,
Immunity from paying any more:
This second, the Vicegerent has to judge.
Third and last suit,—this time, a criminal one,—
Answer to, and protection from, both these,—
Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife
In the Tribunal of the Governor,
Venturini, also judge of the present cause.
Three suits of all importance plaguing him,
Beside a little private enterprise
Of Guido's,—essay at a shorter cut.
For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,
Had, even while superintending these three suits
I' the regular way, each at its proper court,
Ingeniously made interest with the Pope
To set such tedious regular forms aside,

And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,
Declare for the husband and against the wife.
Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits,—
The man at bay, buffeted in this wise,—
Happened the strangest accident of all.
"Then," sigh friends, "the last feather broke his back,
"Made him forget all possible remedies
"Save one—he rushed to, as the sole relief
"From horror and the abominable thing."
"Or rather," laugh foes, "then did there befall
"The luckiest of conceivable events,
"Most pregnant with impunity for him,
"Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,
"And bade him do his wickedest and worst."
—The wife's withdrawal from the Convertites,
Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
And birth there of his babe. Divergence here!
I simply take the facts, ask what they show.

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise:
Then follow all the signs and silences
Premonitory of earthquake. Paolo first
Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome:
(Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue.)
Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,
Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward,
Comes to ter ns with four peasants young and bold,
And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
At very holiest, for 'tis Christmas Eve,
And makes straight for the Abate's dried-up font,
The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes.
And then, rest taken, observation made
And plan completed, all in a grim week,
The five proceed in a body, reach the place,
—Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
And stupefied by the propitious snow.
'Tis one i' the evening: knock: a voice
"Who's there?"
"Friends with a letter from the priest your friend."
At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self.
She falls,—her son-in-law stabs through and through,
Reaches through her at Pietro—"With your son
"This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
"Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
"Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"
—"Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
He presently got his portion and lay still.
And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake,
Falls also: Guido's, this last husband's-act.
He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
While the other tries if life come from the mouth—
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So—dead at last!"
Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
Tumbled the neighbours—for the shrieks had pierced
To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that shed.
Soon followed the Public Force; pursuit began
Though Guido had the start and chose the road:
So, that same night was he, with the other four,
Overtaken near Baccano,—where they sank
By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,
And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine,
Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same

The sleep o' the just,—a journey of twenty miles
Brought just and unjust to a level, you see.
The only one i' the world that suffered aught
By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,
Was just the officer who took them, Head
O' the Public Force,—Patrizj, zealous soul,
Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,
Got heated, caught a fever and so died:
A warning to the over-vigilant,
—Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
Lest pleurisy get start of providence.
(That's for the Cardinal, and told, I think!)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome.
Says Guido, "By your leave, I fain would ask
"How you found out 'twas I who did the deed?
"What put you on my trace, a foreigner,
"Supposed in Arezzo,—and assuredly safe
"Except for an oversight: who told you, pray?"
"Why, naturally your wife!" Down Guido drops
O' the horse he rode,—they have to steady and stay,
At either side the brute that bore him, bound,
So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak!
She had prayed—at least so people tell you now—
For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
Not simply,—as did Pietro 'mid the stabs,—
Time to confess and get her own soul saved—
But time to make the truth apparent, truth
For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie:
Which seems to have been about the single prayer
She ever put up, that was granted her.
With this hope in her head, of telling truth,—
Being familiarized with pain, beside,—
She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch
Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point.

Her friends subjoin this—have I done with them?—
And cite the miracle of continued life
(She was not dead when I arrived just now)
As attestation to her probity.

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
The self-command and even the final prayer,
Our candour must acknowledge explicable
As easily by the consciousness of guilt.
So, when they add that her confession runs
She was of wifehood one white innocence
In thought, word, act, from first of her short life
To last of it; praying, i' the face of death,
That God forgive her other sins—not this,
She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
Anyway to her husband: while thereon
Comments the old Religious—"So much good,
"Patience beneath enormity of ill,
"I hear to my confusion, woe is me,
"Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
"I have practised and grown old in, by a child!"—
Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, "Just this same
"Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
"Confirms us,—being the natural result
"Of a life which proves consistent to the close.
"Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
"She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby
"Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven:
"First sets her lover free, imperilled sore
"By the new turn things take: he answers yet
"For the part he played: they have summoned him indeed:
"The past ripped up, he may be punished still:
"What better way of saving him than this?
"Then,—thus she dies revenged to the uttermost
"On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,
"The lower still the better, do you doubt?

"Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,
"And hate her hate,—death, hell is no such price
"To pay for these,—lovers and haters hold."
But there's another parry for the thrust.
"Confession," cry folks — "a confession, think!
"Confession of the moribund is true!"
Which of them, my wise friends? This public one,
Or the private other we shall never know?
The private may contain,—your casuists teach,—
The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,
That other public one, so people say.
However it be,—we trench on delicate ground,
Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards,—
Can one find nothing in behalf of this
Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb!
You criticize the drunken reel, fool's speech,
Maniacal gesture of the man,—we grant!
But who poured poison in his cup, we ask?
Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,
First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,
Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world
By the story, true or false, of his wife's birth,—
The last seal publicly apposed to shame
By the open flight of wife and priest,—why, Sirs,
Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know
What another guess tribunal than ours here,
Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,
Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight?
Guido preferred the same complaint before
The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke,—
In virtue of it being Tuscany
Where the offence had rise and flight began,—
Self-same complaint he made in the sequel here
Where the offence grew to the full, the flight
Ended: offence and flight, one fact judged twice
By two distinct tribunals,—what result?
There was a sentence passed at the same time
By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke,
Which nothing baulks of swift and sure effect
But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome
Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)
—Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom
Of all whom law just lets escape from death.
The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life,—
That's what the wife deserves in Tuscany:
Here, she deserves—remitting with a smile
To her father's house, main object of the flight!
The thief presented with the thing he steals!

At this discrepancy of judgments—mad,
The man took on himself the office, judged;
And the only argument against the use
O' the law he thus took into his own hands
Is . . . what, I ask you?—that, revenging wrong,
He did not revenge sooner, kill at first
Whom he killed last! That is the final charge.
Sooner? What's soon or late i' the case?—ask we.
A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress;
It smarts a little to-day, well in a week,
Forgotten in a month; or never, or now, revenge!
But a wound to the soul? That rankles worse and worse.
Shall I comfort you, explaining—"Not this once
"But now it may be some five hundred times
"I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue:
"The injury must be less by lapse of time?"
The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,
And that you bore it those five hundred times,
Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,
Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse!
Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,
If left no other.

"But we left this man
"Many another way, and there's his fault,"

'Tis answered—"He himself preferred our arm
"O' the law to fight his battle with. No doubt
"We did not open him an armoury
"To pick and choose from, use, and then reject.
"He tries one weapon and fails,—he tries the next
"And next: he flourishes wit and common sense,
"They fail him,—he plies logic doughtily,
"It fails him too,—thereon, discovers last
"He has been blind to the combustibles—
"That all the while he is a-glow with ire,
"Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so
"May try explosives and discard cold steel,—
"So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!
"Is this the honest self-forgetting rage
"We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull
"Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd
"And journey with them over hill and dale
"Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save
That friends accept our bull-similitude.
Bull-like,—the indiscriminate slaughter, rude
And reckless aggravation of revenge,
Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once
Ceases, amid all provocation more,
To bear in mind the first tormentor, first
Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight:
And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
And only after prostrating his prize
Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey.
So Guido rushed against Violante, first
Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo Malorum*—drops first, deluge since,—which done,
He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached!
How is that? There are difficulties perhaps
On any supposition, and either side.
Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
For its object of compassion, more than just.
Cry the wife's friends, "O the enormous crime
"Caused by no provocation in the world!"
"Was not the wife a little weak?"—inquire—
"Punished extravagantly, if you please,
"But meriting a little punishment?
"One treated inconsiderately, say,
"Rather than one deserving not at all
"Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort?"
No, they must have her purity itself,
Quite angel,—and her parents angels too
Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed:
At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,
Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them
The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,
Which otherwise were safe and secret now.
Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes
For nothing! Hell broke loose on a butterfly!
A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon!
Yet here is the monster! Why he's a mere man—
Born, bred and brought up in the usual way.
His mother loves him, still his brothers stick
To the good fellow of the boyish games;
The Governor of his town knows and approves,
The Archbishop of the place knows and assists:
Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,
Cardinal That to trust for the future,—match
And marriage were a Cardinal's making,—in short,
What if a tragedy be acted here
Impossible for malice to improve,
And innocent Guido with his innocent four
Be added, all five, to the guilty three,
That we of these last days be edified
With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth seems what
I show :—
Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
To give the mob an inkling of our lights.
It seems unduly harsh to put the man
To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
Though readiest way of twisting out the
truth ;
He is noble, and he may be innocent.
On the other hand, if they exempt the man
(As it is also said they hesitate
On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
I' the case of nobility and privilege),—
What crime that ever was, ever will be,
Deserves the torture? Then abolish it!
You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine!
What, she prefers going and joining play?
Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?
I am of their mind: only, all this talk
talked,
'Twas not for nothing that we talked, I hope?
Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome: no particular thanks, I beg!
(You'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here!)

V.—COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

Thanks, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 'tis wine,
Velletri,—and not vinegar and gall,
So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind Sir!
Oh, but one sip's enough! I want my head
To save my neck, there's work awaits me still.
How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie,
Nor your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,
From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,
I have been put to the rack: all's over now,
And neither wrist—what men style, out of joint:
If any harm be, 'tis the shoulder-blade,
The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket,
—Sirs,
Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
In short, I thank you,—yes, and mean the word.
Needs must the Court be slow to understand
How this quite novel form of taking pain,
This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
Amounts to almost an agreeable change
In my case, me fastidious, plied too much
With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.
Four years have I been operated on
I' the soul, do you see—its tense or tremulous part—
My self-respect, my care for a good name,
Pride in an old one, love of kindred—just
A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
That looked up to my face when days were dim,
And fancied they found light there—no one spot,
Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.
That, and not this you now oblige me with,
That was the Vigil-torment, if you please!
The poor old noble House that drew the rags
O' the Franceschini's once superb array
Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by,—
Pluck off these! Turn the drapery inside out
And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears!
Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
Of the easy-natured Count before this Count,
The father I have some slight feeling for,
Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends
Then proud to cap and kiss their patron's shoe,

Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
Properly push his child to wall one day!
Mimic the tetchy humour, furtive glance,
And brow where half was furious, half fatigued,
O' the same son got to be of middle age,
Sour, saturnine,—your humble servant here,—
When things go cross and the young wife, he finds
Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool!—
Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
And beg to civilly ask what's evil here,
Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem
He's given unduly to, of beating her:
. . . Oh, sure he beats her—why says John so else,
Who is cousin to George who is sib to Tecla's self
Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair?
What! 'Tis my wrist you merely dislocate
For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
—Let the old mother's economy alone,
How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year?
—How she can dress and dish up—lordly dish
Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance—
With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man
The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,
A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours,
While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,
Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue
Through policy,—a rhetorician's trick,—
Because I would reserve some choicer points
O' the practice, more exactly parallel
(Having an eye to climax) with what gift,
Eventual grace the Court may have in store
I' the way of plague—what crown of punishments.
When I am hanged or headed, time enough
To prove the tenderness of only that,
Mere heading, hanging,—not their counterpart,
Not demonstration public and precise
That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife,
Her mother's birthright-license as is just,—
Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
Nor disallow their bastard as my heir!
Your sole mistake,—dare I submit so much
To the reverend Court?—has been in all this pains
To make a stone roll down hill,—rack and wrench
And rend a man to pieces, all for what?
Why—make him ope mouth in his own defence,
Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed,
(Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be)
And clear his fame a little, beside the luck
Of stopping even yet, if possible,
Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe—
For that, out come the implements of law!
May it content my lords the gracious Court
To listen only half so patient-long
As I will in that sense profusely speak,
And—fie, they shall not call in screws to help!
I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs;
Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife,
Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
Her father and her mother to ruin me.
There's the irregular deed: you want no more
Than right interpretation of the same,
And truth so far—am I to understand?
To that then, with convenient speed,—because
Now I consider,—yes, despite my boast,
There is an ailing in this omoplat[1]
May clip my speech all too abruptly short,
Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth!

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity!
Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me

[1] *Omoplat:* shoulder-blade.

Through my persistent treading in the paths
Where I was trained to go,—wearing that yoke
My shoulder was predestined to receive,
Born to the hereditary stoop and crease?
Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
The Church, my suzerain; no mock-mistress, she;
The secular owned the spiritual: mates of mine
Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call
"Forsake the clover and come drag my wain!"
There they go cropping: I protruded nose
To halter, bent my back of docile beast,
And now am whealed, one wide wound all of me,
For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day
Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass:
—My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,
—My one reward, I help the Court to smile!

I am representative of a great line,
One of the first of the old families
In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.
When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,
His worst exception runs—not first in rank
But second, noble in the next degree
Only; not malice' self maligns me more.
So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,
A marvel of a book, sustains the point
That Francis boasts the primacy 'mid saints;
Yet not inaptly hath his argument
Obtained response from yon my other lord
In thesis published with the world's applause
—Rather 'tis Dominic such post befits:
Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,
Second in rank to Dominic it may be,
Still, very saintly, very like our Lord;
And I at least descend from Guido once
Homager to the Empire, nought below—
Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
Having a single gift beyond brave blood,
Or able to do aught but give, give, give
In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
Be that as it likes you, Sirs,—whenever it chanced
Myself grew capable anyway of remark,
(Which was soon—penury makes wit premature)
This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole:
On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin
Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
Reared of the low-tide and aright therein.
The enviable youth with the old name,
Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
A heartful of desire, man's natural load,
A brainful of belief, the noble's lot,—
All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry
I' the wave's retreat,—the misery, good my lords,
Which made you merriment at Rome of late,—
It made me reason, rather—muse, demand
—Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe
Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
Blew on the earthen basket of live ash,
Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?
I asked my fellows, how came this about?
"Why, Jack, the suttler's child, perhaps the camp's,
"Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town
"And got rewarded as was natural.
"She of the coach and six—excuse me there!
"Why, don't you know the story of her friend?
"A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,

"His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more,
"Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest,
"Till one day . . . don't you mind that telling tract
"Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote?
"He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk
"Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind,
"Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own;
"Quick came promotion,—*suum cuique*, Count!
"Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure!"
"—Well, let me go, do likewise: war's the word—
"That way the Franceschini worked at first,
"I'll take my turn, try soldiership."—"What, you?
"The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
"So do you see your duty? Here's your post,
"Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
"This youngster, play the gipsy out of doors,
"And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us?)
"Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home!"
"—Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade!
"We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
"And minor glories manifold. Try the Church,
"The tonsure, and,—since heresy's but half-slain
"Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote,—
"Have at Molinos!"—"Have at a fool's head!
"You a priest? How were marriage possible?
"There must be Franceschini till time ends—
"That's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,
"Paul shall be porporate,[1] and Girolamo step
"Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
"But save one Franceschini for the age!
"Be not the vine but dig and dung its root,
"Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
"With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
"Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back!
"Go hence to Rome, be guided!"

So I was.
I turned alike from the hill-side zig-zag thread
Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminate,
—Ventured to mount no platform like my lords
Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag—
But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
As who should fetch and carry, come and go,
Meddle and make i' the cause my lords love most—
The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
By the Church, which happens to be through God himself.
Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand,—
Or would stand but for the omoplat, you see!
Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot:
Which means—I settled home-accounts with speed,
Set apart just a modicum should suffice
To hold the villa's head above the waves
Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so
As to keep breath i' the body, out of heart
Amid the advance of neighbouring loftiness—
(People like building where they used to beg)—
Till succoured one day,—shared the residue
Between my mother and brothers and sisters there,

[1] *Porporate:* wearing purple, the colour of a cardinal.

Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That,
As near to starving as might decently be,
—Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,
A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove
With a ring to it for the digits of the niece
Sure to be helpful in his household,—then
Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.
Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
Three or four orders of no consequence,
—They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
For example; bind a man to nothing more,
Give clerical savour to his layman's-salt,
Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock,
Fragments to brim the basket of a friend—
While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
—Ready to let the basket go its round
Even though my turn was come to help myself,
Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
As just the understander of a joke
And not immoderate in repartee.
Utrique sic paratus,[1] Sirs, I said,
"Here," (in the fortitude of years fifteen,
So good a pedagogue is penury)
"Here wait, do service,—serving and to serve!
"And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
"The recognition of my service comes.
"Next year I'm only sixteen. I can wait."

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court:
Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung
Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
And fly aloft,—succeed, in the usual phrase.
Everyone soon or late comes round by Rome:
Stand still here, you'll see all in turn succeed.
Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that,
Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
Soon bought land as became him, names it now:
I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
Traverse the half-mile avenue,—a term,[2]
A cypress, and a statue, three and three,—
Deliver message from my Monsignor,
With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
I'm barred from who bear mud upon my shoe.
My father's chaplain's nephew, Chamberlain,—
Nothing less, please you!—courteous all the same,
—He does not see me though I wait an hour
At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of busts,
A noseless Sylla, Marius maimed to match,
My father gave him for a hexastich[3]
Made on my birthday,—but he sends me down,
To make amends, that relic I prize most—
The unburnt end o' the very candle, Sirs,
Purfled with paint so prettily round and round,
He carried in such state last Peter's-day,—
In token I, his gentleman and squire,
Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule
Without a tittup the procession through.
Nay, the official,—one you know, sweet lords!—
Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
To the New Prisons from Tordinona,—he
Graciously had remembrance—"Francesc . . . ha?
"His sire, now—how a thing shall come about!—
"Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
"For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
"When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart,
"And I was prompt and pushing! By all means!
"At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie,—

[1] *Utrique sic paratus*: "thus prepared for either (Church or world)."

[2] *Term*: a figure of Terminus, the god of boundaries, consisting of only a bust, ending in a rectangular pedestal.

[3] *Hexastich*: stanza of six lines.

"Anything for an old friend!" and thereat
Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
These were my fellows, such their fortunes now,
While I—kept fasts and feasts innumerable,
Matins and vespers, functions to no end
I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal's reward
Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot
Except when some Ambassador, or such like,
Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
The tick of time inside me, turning-point
And slight sense there was now enough of this:
That I was near my seventh climacteric,
Hard upon, if not over, the middle life,
And, although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still
My gorge gave symptom it might play me false;
Better not press it further,—be content
With living and dying only a nobleman,
Who merely had a father great and rich,
Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
And so on back and back till first and best
Began i' the night; I finish in the day.
"The mother must be getting old," I said;
"The sisters are well wedded away, our name
"Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
"And do for dowry: both my brothers thrive—
"Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide
"'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege.
"My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
"I am tired: Arezzo's air is good to breathe;
"Vittiano,—one limes flocks of thrushes there;
"A leathern coat costs little and lasts long:
"Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!"
Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.
Whereat began the little buzz and thrill
O' the gazers round me; each face brightened up:
As when at your Casino, deep in dawn,
A gamester says at last, "I play no more,
"Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
"Anyhow:" and the watchers of his ways,
A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more,
Break up the ring, venture polite advice—
"How, Sir? So scant of heart and hope indeed?
"Retire with neither cross nor pile from play?—
"So incurious, so short-casting?—give your chance
"To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike,
"Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all?"
Such was the chorus: and its goodwill meant—
"See that the loser leave door handsomely!
"There's an ill look,—it's sinister, spoils sport,
"When an old bruised and battered year-by-year
"Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke,
"Reels down the steps of our establishment
"And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
"In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
"And breaks his heart on the outside: people prate
"'Such is the profit of a trip upstairs!'
"Contrive he sidle forth, baulked of the blow
"Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
"No curse but blessings rather on our heads
"For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast,
"Some palpable sort of kind of good to set
"Over and against the grievance: give him quick!"
Whereon protested Paul, "Go hang yourselves!
"Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
"A word in your ear! Take courage, since faint heart
"Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, don't men say?
"There's a *sors*, there's a right Virgilian dip!
"Do you see the happiness o' the hint? At worst,
"If the Church want no more of you, the Court

"No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates,—come,
"Count you are counted: still you've coat to back,
"Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
"But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
"From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
"Entitle you to carry home a wife
"With the proper dowry, let the worst betide!
"Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty: priests should know:
And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,
That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair,
The cits enough, with stomach to be more,
Had just the daughter and exact the sum
To truck for the quality of myself: "She's young,
"Pretty and rich: you're noble, classic, choice.
"Is it to be a match?" "A match," said I.
Done! He proposed all, I accepted all,
And we performed all. So I said and did
Simply. As simply followed, not at first
But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
One comment on the saying and doing—
"What?
"No blush at the avowal you dared buy
"A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
"Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
"Are heart and soul a chattel?"
Softly, Sirs!
Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world,
Allowed by custom and convenience, save
This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod?
Take me along with you; where was the wrong step?
If what I gave in barter, style and state
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
Were worthless,—why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honour of birth,—
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You've no reward nor punishment to give
I' the giving or the taking honour; straight
Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards.
Get honour, and keep honour free from flaw,
Aim at still higher honour,—gabble o' the goose!
Go bid a second blockhead like myself
Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,
Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,
Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse!
All my privation and endurance, all
Love, loyalty and labour dared and did,
Fiddle-de-dee!—why, doer and darer both,—
Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
Far better, spent his life with more effect,
As a dancer or a prizer, trades that pay!
On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honour is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price,—now up, now down,
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!
"Does my name purchase," had I dared inquire,
"Your niece, my lord?" there would have been rebuff
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else—
"Not altogether! Rank for rank may stand:
"But I have wealth beside, you—poverty;
"Your scale flies up there: bid a second bid
"Rank too and wealth too!" Reasoned like yourself!
But was it to you I went with goods to sell?
This time 'twas my scale quietly kissed the ground,
Mere rank against mere wealth—some youth beside,
Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought
To deal o' the square: others find fault, it seems:
The thing is, those my offer most concerned,

Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul? 480
What did they make o' the terms? Preposterous terms?
Why then accede so promptly, close with such
Nor take a minute to chaffer? Bargain struck,
They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
Repented them, no doubt: why, so did I, 485
So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,
Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece
By Pietro of Cortona—probably
His scholar Ciro Ferri may have retouched—
You caring more for colour than design— 490
Getting a little tired of cupids too.
That's incident to all the folk who buy!
I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud;
I falsified and fabricated, wrote
Myself down roughly richer than I prove, 495
Rendered a wrong revenue,—grant it all!
Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say:
A flourish round the figures of a sum
For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
The veritable back-bone, understood 500
Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
Being the exchange of quality for wealth,—
What may such fancy-flights be? Flecks of oil
Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
I may have dripped a drop—"My name I sell; 505
"Not but that I too boast my wealth"—as they,
"—We bring you riches; still our ancestor
"Was hardly the rapscallion folk saw flogged,
"But heir to we know who, were rights of force!"
They knew and I knew where the backbone lurked 510
I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe!
I paid down all engaged for, to a doit,
Delivered them just that which, their life long,
They hungered in the hearts of them to gain—
Incorporation with nobility thus 515
In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth.
But when they came to try their gain, my gift,
Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take
The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan 520
And go become familiar with the Great,
Greatness to touch and taste and handle now,—
Why then,—they found that all was vanity,
Vexation, and what Solomon describes!
The old abundant city-fare was best, 525
The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap
Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin
Of the underling at all so many spoons
Fire-new at neighbourly treat,—best, best and best 529
Beyond compare!—down to the loll itself
O' the pot-house settle,—better such a bench
Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais
Under the piecemeal damask canopy
With the coroneted coat of arms a-top!
Poverty and privation for pride's sake, 535
All they engaged to easily brave and bear,—
With the fit upon them and their brains a-work,—
Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
And salamander-like support the flame: 540
He dines on chestnuts, chucks the husks to help
The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc,[1]
Goes off light-hearted: his grimace begins
At the funny humours of the christening-feast
Of friend the money-lender,—then he's touched 545
By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss!
Here was the converse trial, opposite mind:
Here did a petty nature split on rock
Of vulgar wants predestinate for such—
One dish at supper and weak wine to boot!
The prince had grinned and borne: the citizen shrieked, 551
Summoned the neighbourhood to attest the wrong,
Made noisy protest he was murdered,—stoned
And burned and drowned and hanged,—then broke away,
He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest.

[1] *Baioc:* about a halfpenny.

And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords?
This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith?
Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon? Not I!
Rather to Plautus, Terence, Boccaccio's Book,
My townsman, frank Ser Franco's[1] merry Tales,—
To all who strip a vizard from a face,
A body from its padding, and a soul
From froth and ignorance it styles itself,—
If this be other than the daily hap
Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far: now for myself,
My profit or loss i' the matter: married am I:
Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left
To regulate her life for my young bride
Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke
(Sifting my future to predict its fault)
"Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
"How of a certain soul bound up, may-be,
"I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
"From the bride's soul what is it you expect?"
Why, loyalty and obedience,—wish and will
To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
Father and mother shall the woman leave,
Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe:
There is the law: what sets this law aside
In my particular case? My friends submit
"Guide, guardian, benefactor,—fee, faw, fum,
"The fact is you are forty-five years old,
"Nor very comely even for that age:
"Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
Brute this and beast the other as they do!
Come, cards on table! When you chaunt us next
Epithalamium full to overflow
With praise and glory of white womanhood,
The chaste and pure—troll no such lies o'er lip!
Put in their stead a crudity or two,
Such short and simple statement of the case
As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year!
No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
Believe a woman still may take a man
For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
Of armour frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts
One's tongue too much! I'll say—the law's the law:
With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree—
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world.
No rupture,—you must join ere you can break,—
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man,—
Made common cause with those who found as much,
Her parents, Pietro and Violante,—moved
Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.
In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child—to-wit
My misdemeanour. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things,—how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo,[2] stretch and make ends meet.

[1] *Ser Franco:* apparently Sacchetti, see l. 1153. Petrarch, to whom the term "townsman" better applies (since Sacchetti, though a Tuscan, was a Florentine), wrote nothing that can be described as "merry tales."

[2] *Soldo:* about a penny.

Next, the more hateful aspect,—how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's
Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,
The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
Plundered and then cast out, and happily so,
Since,—in due course the abominable comes,—
Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here!
Repugnant in my person as my mind,
I sought,—was ever heard of such revenge?
—To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,
Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
O' the common street to save her, not from hate
Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
With the blister of the lie? . . . the satyr-love
Of who but my own brother, the young priest,
Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
Mark, this yourselves say!—this, none disallows,
Was charged to me by the universal voice
At the instigation of my four-months' wife!—
And then you ask "Such charges so preferred,
" (Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)
" Pricked you to punish now if not before?—
" Did not the harshness double itself, the hate
" Harden?" I answer "Have it your way and will!"
Say my resentment grew apace: what then?
Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find
That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,
Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,
Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft:
Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
That any wife of any husband, caught
Whetting a sting like this against his breast,—
Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,
Married a month and making outcry thus,—
Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
She married: what was it she married for,
Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
" Love" suggests some one, "love, a little word
" Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
The frantic gesture, the devotion due
From Thyrsis to Neæra! Guido's love—
Why not Provençal roses in his shoe,
Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
At casement, with a bravo close beside?
Good things all these are, clearly claimable
When the fit price is paid the proper way.
Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
" Shame, death, damnation—fall these as they may,
" So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
—Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice,—who knows?
I might have fired up, found me at my post,
Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
And garments all at large,—cried " Take me thus!
" Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome—
" To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
" Traversed the town and reached you!"—then, indeed,
The lady had not reached a man of ice!
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused,

And dusty crumblings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please—
The every-day conditions and no more;
Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?
Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
That shuffled from between her pressing paps
To sit on my rough shoulder,—but a hawk,
I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
To do hawk's service—at the Rotunda, say,
Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,
You pick and choose and pay the price for such.
I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
And, should she prove a haggard,—twist her neck!
Did I not pay my name and style, my hope
And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss
I am here! 'Tis scarce the gravity of the Court
Will blame me that I never piped a tune,
Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.
The obligation I incurred was just
To practise mastery, prove my mastership:—
Pompilia's duty was—submit herself,
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.
Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house?
My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul
And neither marry nor burn,—yet priestliness
Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond
In its own blessed special ordinance
Whereof indeed was marriage made the type:
The Church may show her insubordinate,
As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp
After the first month's essay? What's the mode
With the Deacon who supports indifferently
The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones
Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind?—
Remit a fast-day's rigour to the Monk
Who fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails,—
Concede the Deacon sweet society,
He never thought the Levite-rule renounced,—
Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
Corrective of such peccant humours? This—
I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
If I was over-harsh,—the worse i' the wife
Who did not win from harshness as she ought,
Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
Of love, should cure me and console herself.
Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve—
What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?
And, if you find I pluck five more for that,
Shall you weep "How he roughs the turtle there"?

Such was the starting; now of the further step.
In lieu of taking penance in good part,
The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
To make a bonfire of the convent, say,—
And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
The ears o' the Court! I try to save my head)
Instructed by the ingenuous postulant,
Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth)—
Such being my next experience. Who knows not—
The couple, father and mother of my wife,
Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
Put into print, made circulate far and wide
That they had cheated me who cheated them?
Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew

Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
Of a drab and a rogue, was by-blow bastard-babe
Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Nought more,
Nought less, nought else but—oh—ah—assuredly
A Franceschini and my very wife!
Now take this charge as you will, for false or true,—
This charge, preferred before your very selves
Who judge me now,—I pray you, adjudge again,
Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
By which category I suffer most!
But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
In either fashion,—I reserve my word,
Justify that in its place; I am now to say,
Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,
Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one.
You put the protestation in her mouth
"Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt
"Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
"In your own shape, no longer father mine
"Nor mother mine! Too nakedly you hate
"Me whom you looked as if you loved once, —me
"Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns,
"Divulged thus to my public infamy,
"Private perdition, absolute overthrow.
"For, hate my husband to your hearts' content,
"I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
"I who have done you the blind service, lured
"The lion to your pitfall,—I, thus left
"To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
"I should have been remembered and withdrawn
"From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
"A proverb and a by-word men will mouth
"At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
"Rome and Arezzo,—there, full in my face,
"If my lord, missing them and finding me,
"Content himself with casting his reproach
"To drop i' the street where such impostors die.
"Ah, but—that husband, what the wonder were!—
"If, far from casting thus away the rag
"Smeared with the plague his hand had chanced upon,
"Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's[1] wile,—
"Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch,
"The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
"Foisted into his stock for honest graft,—
"If he repudiate not, renounce nowise,
"But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause
"By making it his own, (what other way?)
"—To keep my name for me, he call it his,
"Claim it of who would take it by their lie,—
"To save my wealth for me—or babe of mine
"Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth—
"He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again:
"If he become no partner with the pair
"Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
"Its winner life's great wonderful new chance,—
"Of marrying, to-wit, a second time,—
"Ah, if he did thus, what a friend were he!
"Anger he might show,—who can stamp out flame
"Yet spread no black o' the brand?—yet, rough albeit
"In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,
"What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!"

[1] *Locusta:* the name of a notorious female poisoner at Rome in the first century; hence typical of any poisoner.

Such protestation should have been my wife's.
Looking for this, do I exact too much?
Why, here's the,—word for word, so much, no more,—
Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech
To my brother the Abate at first blush,
Ere the good impulse had begun to fade:
So did she make confession for the pair,
So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
"Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords—
"The simulated writing,—'twas a trick:
"You traced the signs, she merely marked the same,
"The product was not hers but yours." Alack,
I want no more impulsion to tell truth
From the other trick, the torture inside there!
I confess all—let it be understood—
And deny nothing! If I baffle you so,
Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
Each pass o' the Bilboa, beats you all the same,—
What matters inefficiency of blade?
Mine and not hers the letter,—conceded, lords!
Impute to me that practice!—take as proved
I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do,
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,
And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,
Forced her to take the right step, I myself
Was marching in marital rectitude!
Why who finds fault here, say the tale be true?
Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
Seized on the sick, morose or moribund,
By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
His brow correctly at the critical time?
—Or answered for the inarticulate babe
At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,
And saved what else would perish unprofessed?
True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
Renounce the sign with renovated strength,—
The babe may grow up man and Molinist,—
And so Pompilia, set in the good path
And left to go alone there, soon might see
That too frank-forward, all too simple-straight
Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side,
And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
Soon she discovered she was young and fair,
That many in Arezzo knew as much.
Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
Had to begin go filling, drop by drop,
Its measure up of full disgust for me,
Filtered into by every noisome drain—
Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
Would not you prophesy—"She on whose brow is stamped
"The note of the imputation that we know,—
"Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore,—
"Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge,
"What will she but exaggerate chastity,
"Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
"Renounce even levities permitted youth,
"Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt?
"Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold, where's the sheep dares bleat,
"Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl?"
So you expect. How did the devil decree?
Why, my lords, just the contrary of course!
It was in the house from the window, at the church
From the hassock,—where the theatre lent its lodge,
Or staging for the public show left space,—
That still Pompilia needs must find herself
Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
Ever new contribution to her lap,
Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?

And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
And come at the dregs to—Caponsacchi! Sirs,
I,—chin-deep in a marsh of misery,
Struggling to extricate my name and fame
And fortune from the marsh would drown them all,
My face the sole unstrangled part of me,—
I must have this new gad-fly in that face,
Must free me from the attacking lover too!
Men say I battled ungracefully enough—
Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond
The proper part o' the husband: have it so!
Your lordships are considerate at least—
You order me to speak in my defence
Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
As when you bid a singer solace you,—
Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,
Stans pede in uno:[1]—you remember well
In the one case, 'tis a plainsong too severe,
This story of my wrongs,—and that I ache
And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me
Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
Already pricked with every shame could perch,—
When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too,—
Why I enforced not exhortation mild
To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone,
With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?

"Far from that! No, you took the opposite course,
"Breathed threatenings, rage and slaughter!" What you will!
And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare
Full on each face of the dead guilty three!
Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this!

Tell me: if on that day when I found first
That Caponsacchi thought the nearest way
To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
And that he so admired, shall I suppose,
The manner of the swallows' come-and-go
Between the props o' the window overhead,—
That window happening to be my wife's,—
As to stand gazing by the hour on high,
Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile,—
If I,—instead of threatening, talking big,
Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle,—making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,
And other bugaboo-and-baby-work,—
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
Saying "For listening to the serenade,
"Here's your ring-finger shorter a full third:
"Be certain I will slice away next joint,
"Next time that anybody underneath
"Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped
"A flower would eddy out of your hand to his
"While you please fidget with the branch above
"O' the rose-tree in the terrace!"—had I done so,
Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
Perhaps reproaches,—but reflections too!
I don't hear much of harm that Malchus did
After the incident of the ear, my lords!
Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
Malchus was sore but silenced for his life:
He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag
And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;

[1] *Stans pede in uno:* "standing on one foot," a metaphor descriptive of anything done easily or off-hand; from Horace, *Sat.* I. 4. 10.

Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
I give that for the course a wise man takes;
I took the other however, tried the fool's,
The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear
Instead of severing the cartilage,
Called her a terrible nickname, and the like,
And there an end: and what was the end of that?
What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
Why, one night I went drowsily to bed,
Dropped asleep suddenly, not suddenly woke,
But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room,
Fumes in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife
Gone God knows whither,—rifled vesture-chest,
And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"
The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
"It must be that our lady has eloped!"
—"Whither and with whom?"—"With whom but the Canon's self?
"One recognizes Caponsacchi there!"—
(By this time the admiring neighbourhood
Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
"'Tis months since their intelligence began,—
"A comedy the town was privy to,—
"He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied,
"And going in and out your house last night
"Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
"Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn
"When you were absent,—at the villa, you know,
"Where husbandry required the master-mind.
"Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see!"
And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
Particulars of the tale were volunteered
With all the breathless zeal of friendship—
"Thus
"Matters were managed: at the seventh hour of night" . . .
—"Later, at daybreak" . . . "Caponsacchi came" . . .
—"While you and all your household slept like death,
"Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff" . . .
—"And your own cousin Guillichini too—
"Either or both entered your dwelling-place,
"Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
"Including your wife . . ."—"Oh, your wife led the way,
"Out of doors, on to the gate . . ."—"But gates are shut,
"In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds:
"They climbed the wall—your lady must be lithe—
"At the gap, the broken bit . . ." —"Torrione, true!
"To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
"Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, 'the Horse,'
"Just outside, a calash in readiness
"Took the two principals, all alone at last,
"To gate San Spirito, which o'erlooks the road,
"Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty."
Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise,
Flat lay my fortune,—tesselated floor,
Imperishable tracery devils should foot
And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
Over my desecrated hearth.
So much
For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs!
Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so.
Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,
I started alone, head of me, heart of me
Fire, and each limb as languid . . . ah, sweet lords,

Bethink you !—poison-torture, try persuade
The next refractory Molinist with that ! . . .
Floundered thro' day and night, another day
And yet another night, and so at last,
As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,
Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn
At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,
Even Caponsacchi,—what part once was priest,
Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags.
In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,
There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,
Chafing that only horseflesh and no team
Of eagles would supply the last relay,
Whirl him along the league, the one post more
Between the couple and Rome and liberty.
'Twas dawn, the couple were rested in a sort,
And though the lady, tired,—the tenderer sex,—
Still lingered in her chamber,—to adjust
The limp hair, look for any blush astray,—
She would descend in a twinkling,—"Have you out
"The horses therefore !"
So did I find my wife.
Is the case complete? Do your eyes here see with mine?
Even the parties dared deny no one
Point out of all these points.
What follows next?
"Why, that then was the time," you interpose,
"Or then or never, while the fact was fresh,
"To take the natural vengeance: there and thus
"They and you,—somebody had stuck a sword
"Beside you while he pushed you on your horse,—
"'Twas requisite to slay the couple, Count!"
Just so my friends say. "Kill!" they cry in a breath,
Who presently, when matters grow to a head
And I do kill the offending ones indeed,—
When crime of theirs, only surmised before,
Is patent, proved indisputably now,—
When remedy for wrong, untried at the time,
Which law professes shall not fail a friend,
Is thrice tried now, found threefold worse than null,—
When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?
Solidifies into a blot which breaks
Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine,—
Then, when I claim and take revenge—"So rash?"
They cry—"so little reverence for the law?"

Listen, my masters, and distinguish here !
At first, I called in law to act and help:
Seeing I did so, "Why, 'tis clear," they cry,
"You shrank from gallant readiness and risk,
"Were coward: the thing's inexplicable else."
Sweet my lords, let the thing be ! I fall flat,
Play the reed, not the oak, to breath of man.
Only inform my ignorance ! Say I stand
Convicted of the having been afraid,
Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb,—
Does that deprive me of my right of lamb
And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?
Are eunuchs, women, children, shieldless quite
Against attack their own timidity tempts?
Cowardice were misfortune and no crime !
—Take it that way, since I am fallen so low
I scarce dare brush the fly that blows my face,
And thank the man who simply spits not there,—
Unless the Court be generous, comprehend
How one brought up at the very feet of law
As I, awaits the grave Gamaliel's nod
Ere he clench fist at outrage,—much less, stab!
—How, ready enough to rise at the right time,
I still could recognise no time mature
Unsanctioned by a move o' the judgment-seat,
So, mute in misery, eyed my masters here
Motionless till the authoritative word

Pronounced amercement. There's the riddle solved:
This is just why I slew nor her nor him,
But called in law, law's delegate in the place,
And bade arrest the guilty couple, Sirs!
We had some trouble to do so—you have heard
They braved me,—he with arrogance and scorn,
She, with a volubility of curse,
A conversancy in the skill of tooth
And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,
Nay, an alacrity to put to proof
At my own throat my own sword, teach me so
To try conclusions better the next time,—
Which did the proper service with the mob.
They never tried to put on mask at all:
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart,
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,
Ay, and with proper clapping and applause
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.
I kept still, said to myself, "There's law!"
Anon
We searched the chamber where they passed the night,
Found what confirmed the worst was feared before,
However needless confirmation now—
The witches' circle intact, charms undisturbed
That raised the spirit and succubus,—letters, to-wit,
Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore
Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive,—
Now, poetry in some rank blossom-burst,
Now, prose,—"Come here, go there, wait such a while,
"He's at the villa, now he's back again:
"We are saved, we are lost, we are lovers all the same!"
All in order, all complete,—even to a clue
To the drowsiness that happed so opportune—
No mystery, when I read "Of all things, find
"What wine Sir Jealousy decides to drink—
"Red wine? Because a sleeping-potion, dust
"Dropped into white, discolours wine and shows."
—"Oh, but we did not write a single word!
"Somebody forged the letters in our name!—"
Both in a breath protested presently.
Aha, Sacchetti[1] again!—"Dame,"—quoth the Duke,
"What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,
"I pick from out thy placket and peruse,
"Wherein my page averreth thou art white
"And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap?"
"Sir," laughed the Lady, "'tis a counterfeit!
"Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,
"The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake:
"To lie were losel,—by my fay, no more!"
And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court! yes, I come to the Court's self;
Such the case, so complete in fact and proof,
I laid at the feet of law,—there sat my lords,
Here sit they now, so may they ever sit
In easier attitude than suits my haunch!
In this same chamber did I bare my sores
O' the soul and not the body,—shun no shame,
Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part,
Since confident in Nature,—which is God,—
That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too:
Law renovates even Lazarus,—cures me!
Cæsar thou seekest? To Cæsar thou shalt go!
Cæsar's at Rome: to Rome accordingly!

The case was soon decided: both weights, cast
I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
Here away, there away, this now and now that.
To every one o' my grievances law gave

[1] *Sacchetti:* Franco Sacchetti, who lived about 1335–1410, author of stories in the manner of Boccaccio.

Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.
The wife stood a convicted runagate
From house and husband,—driven to such a course
By what she somehow took for cruelty,
Oppression and imperilment of life—
Not that such things were, but that so they seemed:
Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
To save life there's no risk should stay our leap)
It follows that all means to the lawful end
Are lawful likewise,—poison, theft and flight.
As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
Enough that he too thought life jeopardized;
Concede him then the colour charity
Casts on a doubtful course,—if blackish white
Or whitish black, will charity hesitate?
What did he else but act the precept out,
Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
Best hope so and think so,—that the ticklish time
I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last
Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
—All may bear explanation: may? then, must!
The letters,—do they so incriminate?
But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all,
Bred of the vapours of my brain belike,
Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
In the courtly Caponsacchi: verse, convict?
Did not Catullus write less seemly once?
Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides.
Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
For the law to solve,—take the solution now!
"Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,
"Bear themselves not without some touch of blame
"—Else why the pother, scandal and outcry
"Which trouble our peace and require chastisement?
"We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight
"And deviation, and carnal intercourse
"With the same, do set aside and relegate
"The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
"At Civita in the neighbourhood of Rome:
"And we consign Pompilia to the care
"Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
"I' the city's self, expert to deal with such."
Word for word, there's your judgment! Read it, lords,
Re-utter your deliberate penalty
For the crime yourselves establish! Your award—
Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
For tracing with forefinger words in wine
O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
Interpretation as they mocked the Church!
—Who brand a woman black between the breasts
For sinning by connection with a Jew:
While for the Jew's self—pudency be dumb!
You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
Punish the adultery of wife and priest!
Take note of that, before the Molinists do,
And read me right the riddle, since right must be!
While I stood rapt away with wonderment,
Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.
"Do you sleep?" began the friends at either ear,
"The case is settled,—you willed it should be so—
"None of our counsel, always recollect!
"With law's award, budge! Back into your place!
"Your betters shall arrange the rest for you.
"We'll enter a new action, claim divorce:
"Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow:
"You erred i' the person,—might have married thus
"Your sister or your daughter unaware.
"We'll gain you, that way, liberty at least,
"Sure of so much by law's own showing. Up
"And off with you and your unluckiness—
"Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth!"

I was in humble frame of mind, be sure ! 1255
I bowed, betook me to my place again.
Station by station I retraced the road,
Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,
Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives
Had risen to the heroic stature : still— 1260
"That was the bench they sat on,—there's the board
"They took the meal at,—yonder garden-ground
"They leaned across the gate of,"—ever a word
O' the Helen and the Paris, with "Ha ! you're he,
"The . . . much-commiserated husband ?" Step 1265
By step, across the pelting, did I reach
Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
Found myself in my horrible house once more,
And after a colloquy . . . no word assists !
With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me 1271
Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
Marched to the public Square and met the world.
Apologize for the pincers, palliate screws ?
Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat ! 1276
Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine !

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
Put non-essentials by and face the fact.
"What need to hang myself as you advise?
"The paramour is banished,—the ocean's width, 1281
"Or the suburb's length,—to Ultima Thule, say,
"Or Proxima Civitas, what's the odds of name
"And place ? He's banished, and the fact's the thing.
"Why should law banish innocence an inch?
"Here's guilt then, what else do I care to know ? 1286
"The adulteress lies imprisoned,—whether in a well
"With bricks above and a snake for company,
"Or tied by a garter to a bed-post,—much
"I mind what's little,—least's enough and to spare ! 1290
"The little fillip on the coward's cheek
"Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
"Law has pronounced there's punishment, less or more :
"And I take note o' the fact and use it thus—
"For the first flaw in the original bond, 1295
"I claim release. My contract was to wed
"The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
"Protest they never had a child at all.
"Then I have never made a contract : good !
"Cancel me quick the thing pretended one.
"I shall be free. What matter if hurried over 1301
"The harbour-boom by a great favouring tide,
"Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves ?
"The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins !
"You shall not laugh me out of faith in law ! 1305
"I listen, through all your noise, to Rome !" Rome spoke.
In three months letters thence admonished me,
"Your plan for the divorce is all mistake.
"It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed 1310
"Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair,
"Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day :
"But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
"Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
"Remains yours all the same for ever more.
"No whit to the purpose is your plea : you err 1316
"I' the person and the quality—nowise
"In the individual,—that's the case in point !
"You go to the ground,—are met by a cross-suit
"For separation, of the Rachel here, 1320
"From bed and board,—she is the injured one,

"You did the wrong and have to answer it.
"As for the circumstance of imprisonment
"And colour it lends to this your new attack,
"Never fear, that point is considered too!
"The durance is already at an end;
"The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
"She is transferred now to her parents' house
"—No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you,
"But parentage again confessed in full,
"When such confession pricks and plagues you more—
"As now—for, this their house is not the house
"In Via Vittoria wherein neighbours' watch
"Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
"But a certain villa smothered up in vines
"At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline Way,
"Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
"Whither a friend,—at Civita, we hope,
"A good half-dozen-hours' ride off,—might, some eve,
"Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
"Nobody the wiser: but be that as it may,
"Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
"You have still three suits to manage, all and each
"Ruinous truly should the event play false.
"It is indeed the likelier so to do,
"That brother Paul, your single prop and stay,
"After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
"To set aside procedures, sit himself
"And summarily use prerogative,
"Afford us the infallible finger's tact
"To disentwine your tangle of affairs,
"Paul,—finding it moreover past his strength
"To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
"Of . . . since friends must speak . . . to be round with you . . .
"Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
"Pitted against a brace of juveniles—
"A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art
"More than his Summa, and a gamesome wife
"Able to act Corinna without book,
"Beside the waggish parents who played dupes
"To dupe the duper—(and truly divers scenes
"Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
"And tease eye till the tears come, so we laugh;
"Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
"And then the letters and poetry—*merum sal!*)
"—Paul, finally, in such a state of things,
"After a brief temptation to go jump
"And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns
"Sorrow another and a wiser way:
"House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone,
"Leaves Rome,—whether for France or Spain, who knows?
"Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
"You have lost him anyhow."
Now,—I see my lords
Shift in their seat,—would I could do the same!
They probably please expect my bile was moved
To purpose, nor much blame me: now, they judge,
The fiery titillation urged my flesh
Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet Sirs!
I got such missives in the public place;
When I sought home,—with such news, mounted stair
And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
('Twas Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable—
The brother, walking misery away
O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,

My wife's bestowment,—I broke silence thus:
"Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
"Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace!
"I am irremediably beaten here,—
"The gross illiterate vulgar couple,—bah!
"Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
"Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
"They have got my name,—'tis nailed now fast to theirs,
"The child or changeling is anyway my wife;
"Point by point as they plan they execute,
"They gain all, and I lose all—even to the lure
"That led to loss,—they have the wealth again
"They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
"Have caught the fish and find the bait entire:
"They even have their child or changeling back
"To trade with, turn to account a second time.
"The brother presumably might tell a tale
"Or give a warning,—he, too, flies the field,
"And with him vanish help and hope of help.
"They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
"Covered my loudest cry for human aid
"With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
"Well, are we demigods or merely clay?
"Is success still attendant on desert?
"Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,
"Or earth which means probation to the end?
"Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
"Of being beaten and baffled?—God's decree,
"In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.
"One of us Franceschini fell long since
"I' the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs,
"To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
"He rushed to free from ravisher, and found
"Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
"Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and laughed:
"Let me end, falling by a like device.
"It will not be so hard. I am the last
"O' my line which will not suffer any more.
"I have attained to my full fifty years,
"(About the average of us all, 'tis said,
"Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
"—Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
"Me and the house and grief and shame at once.
"Friends my informants,—I can bear your blow!"
And I believe 'twas in no unmeet match
For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile,
That, when morose December roused me next,
I took into my hand, broke seal to read
The new epistle from Rome. "All to no use!
"Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
"Here's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
"I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends!
"Are the three suits decided in a trice?
"Against me,—there's no question! How does it go?
"Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
"Infamous to her wish? Parades she now
"Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?
"Is the last penny extracted from my purse
"To mulct me for demanding the first pound
"Was promised in return for value paid?
"Has the priest, with nobody to court beside,
"Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap
"Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled
"At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
"And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
"Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these!
"As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
"To its old cold stone face,—stuck your cap for crest
"Over the shield that's extant in the Square,—

"Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
"Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church:
"Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
"Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye!
"My brothers are priests, and childless so; that's well—
"And, thank God most for this, no child leave I—
"None after me to bear till his heart break
"The being a Franceschini and my son!"

"Nay," said the letter, "but you have just that!
"A babe, your veritable son and heir—
"Lawful,—'tis only eight months since your wife
"Left you,—so, son and heir, your babe was born
"Last Wednesday in the villa,—you see the cause
"For quitting Convent without beat of drum,
"Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
"That's not so savage as the Sisterhood
"To slips and stumbles: Pietro's heart is soft,
"Violante leans to pity's side,—the pair
"Ushered you into life a bouncing boy:
"And he's already hidden away and safe
"From any claim on him you mean to make—
"They need him for themselves,—don't fear, they know
"The use o' the bantling,—the nerve thus laid bare
"To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail!"

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
What, all is only beginning not ending now?
The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
To the bone and there lay biting, did its best,—
What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,
Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?
There's to be yet my representative,
Another of the name shall keep displayed
The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
The broken sword has served to stir a jakes?
Who will he be, how will you call the man?
A Franceschini,—when who cut my purse,
Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst,
When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently:—
But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
When what demands its tribute of applause
Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave
Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned
By a witness to his feat i' the following age,—
And how this three-fold cord could hook and fetch
And land leviathan that king of pride!
Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe?
Was it because fate forged a link at last
Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
Found we had henceforth some one thing to love,
Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark
Dance in on me to cover her escape?
Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
Over and above the measure of infamy,
Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame,—
Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
The baby-softness of my first-born child—
The child I had died to see though in a dream,
The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,
So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
At the feet so dim and distant and divine
Of the apparition, as 'twere Mary's Babe
Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft,—
Born now in very deed to bear this brand

On forehead and curse me who could not save!
Rather be the town-talk true, square's jest, street's jeer
True, my own inmost heart's confession true,
And he the priest's bastard and none of mine!
Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure!
The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
When he encounters some familiar face,
Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips
Where he least looked to find them,—time to fly!
This bastard then, a nest for him is made,
As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh:
Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
No, I appeal to God,—what says Himself,
How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
Why, that I am alive, am still a man
With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too—
Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,
To right me if I fail to take my right.
No more of law; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?*[1]

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale
To my own serving-people summoned there:
Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end
By judges who got done with judgment quick
And clamoured to go execute her 'hest—
Who cried "Not one of us that dig your soil
"And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
"But would have brained the man debauched our wife,
"And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
"And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
"Who ruled the land yet barred us such revenge!"
I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four
Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh,
Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin
Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
Donned the first rough and rural garb I found,
Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
And out we flung and on we ran or reeled
Romeward. I have no memory of our way,
Only that, when at intervals the cloud
Of horror about me opened to let in life,
I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
Of a legend, relic of religion, stray
Fragment of record very strong and old
Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench
The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
Satan and all his malice into dust,
Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so
I found myself, as on the wings of winds,
Arrived: I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells—everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man!
I am baptized. I started and let drop
The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
To enter into no temptation more.
I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
Deserted,—let the ghost of social joy
Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
And idle door that missed the master's step,—
Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
As my own people watched without a word,
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth
Black like all else, that nod so slow to come.
I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
"Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
O' the Holy Infant and the halo there

[1] *Quis est pro Domino:* "Who is on the Lord's side?"

Able to cover yet another face
Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
And showed only the Cross at end of all,
Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me
And the dread duty: for the angels' song,
"Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed
"O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"
On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
I started up—"Some end must be!" At once,
Silence: then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
"One more concession, one decisive way
"And but one, to determine thee the truth,—
"This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear:
"Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act!"

"That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear!
"I doubt, I will decide, then act," said I,—
Then beckoned my companions: "Time is come!"

And so, all yet uncertain save the will
To do right, and the daring aught save leave
Right undone, I did find myself at last
I' the dark before the villa with my friends,
And made the experiment, the final test,
Ultimate chance that ever was to be
For the wretchedness inside. I knocked, pronounced
The name, the predetermined touch for truth,
"What welcome for the wanderer? Open straight—"
To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds,
Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind?
No, but—"to Caponsacchi!" And the door
Opened.
And then,—why, even then, I think,
I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
Surely,—I pray God that I think aright!—
Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
Fronted me in the door-way,—stood there faint
With the recent pang perhaps of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child,—
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practise and conspire against my peace,—
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth,—
Violante Comparini, she it was,
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.
There was the end!
Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life. 'Twas done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so.
You came on me that night,

Your officers of justice,—caught the crime
In the first natural frenzy of remorse?
Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
With the bloody arms beside me,—was it not so?
Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
I was my own self, had my sense again,
My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep:
Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space,
When you dismiss me, having truth enough!
It is but a few days are passed, I find,
Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?
Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side
At the church Lorenzo,—oh, they know it well!
So do I. But my wife is still alive,
Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
Her way, which is not mine, no doubt at all.
And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him,—
Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
Or had not been so lavish: less had served.
Well, he too tells his story,—florid prose
As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords,
There will be a lying intoxicating smoke
Born of the blood,—confusion probably,—
For lies breed lies—but all that rests with you!
The trial is no concern of mine; with me
The main of the care is over: I at least
Recognize who took that huge burthen off,
Let me begin to live again. I did
God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free;
Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,
That great Physician, and dared lance the core
Of the bad ulcer; and the rage abates,
I am myself and whole now: I prove cured
By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,
The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes
And taking to our common life once more,
All that now urges my defence from death.
The willingness to live, what means it else?
Before,—but let the very action speak!
Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me
Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched
Head-foremost into danger as a fool
That never cares if he can swim or no—
So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
No man omits precaution, quite neglects
Secresy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
Having schemed he might advance. Did I so scheme?
Why, with a warrant which 'tis ask and have,
With horse thereby made mine without a word,
I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night.
Then, my companions,—call them what you please,
Slave or stipendiary,—what need of one
To me whose right-hand did its owner's work?
Hire an assassin yet expose yourself?
As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand
I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
Sends only agents out, with pay to earn:
At home, when they come back,—he straight discards
Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
When a man's foes are of his house, like mine,
Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
When there's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
Clearly my life was valueless.

But now
Health is returned, and sanity of soul
Nowise indifferent to the body's harm.
I find the instinct bids me save my life;
My wits, too, rally round me; I pick up

And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
Unnoticed or spurned aside: I take my stand,
Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
May do Him further service, while I speak
And you hear, you my judges and last hope!
You are the law: 'tis to the law I look.
I began life by hanging to the law,
To the law it is I hang till life shall end.
My brother made appeal to the Pope, 'tis true,
To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
Nor trouble law,—some fondness of conceit
That rectitude, sagacity sufficed
The investigator in a case like mine,
Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
And put me back to law,—referred the cause
Ad judices meos,—doubtlessly did well.
Here, then, I clutch my judges,—I claim law—
Cry, by the higher law whereof your law
O' the land is humbly representative,—
Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
I fail to furnish you defence? I stand
Acquitted, actually or virtually,
By every intermediate kind of court
That takes account of right or wrong in man,
Each unit in the series that begins
With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here.
God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard,
Passed on successively to each court I call
Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make
More and more effort to promulgate, mark
God's verdict in determinable words,
Till last come human jurists—solidify
Fluid result,—what's fixable lies forged,
Statute,—the residue escapes in fume,
Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable
To the finer sense as word the legist welds.
Justinian's Pandects only make precise
What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
Waited the speech they called but would not come.
These courts then, whose decree your own confirms,—
Take my whole life, not this last act alone,
Look on it by the light reflected thence!
What has Society to charge me with?
Come, unreservedly,—favour none nor fear,—
I am Guido Franceschini, am I not?
You know the courses I was free to take?
I took just that which let me serve the Church,
I gave it all my labour in body and soul
Till these broke down i' the service.
"Specify?"
Well, my last patron was a Cardinal.
I left him unconvicted of a fault—
Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
Into the new life that I left him for,
This very misery of the marriage,—he
Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay—
Signed the deed where you yet may see his name.
He is gone to his reward,—dead, being my friend
Who could have helped here also,—that, of course!
So far, there's my acquittal, I suppose.
Then comes the marriage itself—no question, lords,
Of the entire validity of that!
In the extremity of distress, 'tis true,
For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,
I wished the thing invalid, went to you
Only some months since, set you duly forth
My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat
Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
"Annul a marriage? 'Tis impossible!
"Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
"Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"
Well, let me have the benefit, just so far,
O' the fact announced,—my wife then is my wife,
I have allowance for a husband's right.

I am charged with passing right's due bound,
—such acts
As I thought just, my wife called cruelty,
Complained of in due form,—convoked no court
Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs—
And not once, but so long as patience served—
To the town's top, jurisdiction's pride of place,
To the Archbishop and the Governor.
These heard her charge with my reply, and found
That futile, this sufficient: they dismissed
The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed
Authority in its wholesome exercise,
They, with directest access to the facts.
"—Ay, for it was their friendship favoured you,
"Hereditary alliance against a breach
"I' the social order: prejudice for the name
"Of Franceschini!"—So I hear it said:
But not here. You, lords, never will you say
"Such is the nullity of grace and truth,
"Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
"Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
"For daring reprehend us as they do,—
"That we pronounce it just a common case,
"Two dignitaries, each in his degree
"First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
"The secular arm o' the body politic,
"Should, for mere wrongs' love and injustice' sake,
"Side with, aid and abet in cruelty
"This broken beggarly noble,—bribed perhaps
"By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread—
"Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
"Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
"Looking the irresistible loveliness
"In tears that takes man captive, turns"
. . . enough!
Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids
Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
Who set the example and instruct their tongue?
You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto
And yield to public clamour though i' the right!
You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
The noble whose misfortune wearied you,—
Or, what's more probable, made common cause
With the cleric section, punished in myself
Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
Defective in behaviour to a priest
Who claimed the customary partnership
I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
Look to it,—or allow me freed so far!

Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped
In company with the priest her paramour:
And I gave chase, came up with, caught the two
At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
By documents with name and plan and date,
The fault was furtive then that's flagrant now,
Their intercourse a long established crime.
I did not take the license law's self gives
To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
But held my hand,—preferred play prodigy
Of patience which the world calls cowardice,
Rather than seem anticipate the law
And cast discredit on its organs,—you.
So, to your bar I brought both criminals,
And made my statement: heard their counter-charge,
Nay,—their corroboration of my tale,
Nowise disputing its allegements, not
I' the main, not more than nature's decency
Compels men to keep silence in this kind,—
Only contending that the deeds avowed
Would take another colour and bear excuse.

You were to judge between us; so you did.
You disregard the excuse, you breathe away
The colour of innocence and leave guilt black,
"Guilty" is the decision of the court,
And that I stand in consequence untouched,
One white integrity from head to heel.
Not guilty? Why then did you punish them?
True, punishment has been inadequate—
'Tis not I only, not my friends that joke,
My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate"—
For, by a chance that comes to help for once,
The same case simultaneously was judged
At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
Where the crime had its beginning but not end.
They then, deciding on but half o' the crime,
The effraction, robbery,—features of the fault
I never cared to dwell upon at Rome,—
What was it they adjudged as penalty
To Pompilia,—the one criminal o' the pair
Amenable to their judgment, not the priest
Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
I' the Stinche. There was Tuscany's award
To a wife that robs her husband: you at Rome—
Having to deal with adultery in a wife
And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow—
Give gentle sequestration for a month
In a manageable Convent, then release,
You call imprisonment, in the very house
O' the very couple, which the aim and end
Of the culprits' crime was—just to reach and rest
And there take solace and defy me: well,—
This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours
Is immaterial: make your penalty less—
Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
And white fan, she who wore the opposite—
Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
Reconcile to your conscience as you may,
Be it on your own heads, you pronounced but half
O' the penalty for heinousness like hers
And his, that pays a fault at Carnival
Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck!
I acquiesce for my part: punished, though
By a pin-point scratch, means guilty: guilty means
—What have I been but innocent hitherto?
Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.

Ends?—for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
That was throughout the veritable aim
O' the sentence light or heavy,—to redress
Recognized wrong? You righted me, I think?
Well then,—what if I, at this last of all,
Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves,
No particle of wrong received thereby
One atom of right?—that cure grew worse disease?
That in the process you call "justice done"
All along you have nipped away just inch
By inch the creeping climbing length of plague
Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,
And left me, after all and every act
Of your interference,—lightened of what load?
At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
"Now I was saved, now I should feel no more
"The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye
"And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned,
There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
Renewing its detested spire and spire
Around me, rising to such heights of hate
That, so far from mere purpose now to crush
And coil itself on the remains of me,
Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
Make me anew, satisfy in my son
The hunger I may feed but never sate,
Tormented on to perpetuity,—
My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight
In heaven that's turned to hell, or hell returned
(So rather say) to this same earth again,—
Moulded into the image and made one,

Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
By that thief, poisoner and adulteress
I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name,
Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here!
And last led up to the glory and prize of hate
By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
The perjured priest, pink of conspirators,
Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine,
Manhood to model adolescence by!
Lords, look on me, declare,—when, what I show,
Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
And doled me out for justice,—what did you say?
For reparation, restitution and more,—
Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
For having done the thing you thought to do,
And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last?
I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,
Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike,
Carried into effect your mandate here
That else had fallen to ground: mere duty done,
Oversight of the master just supplied
By zeal i' the servant. I, being used to serve,
Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with?
Blackened again, made legible once more
Your own decree, not permanently writ,
Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced.
It reads efficient, now, comminatory,
A terror to the wicked, answers so
The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant!
Protect your own defender,—save me, Sirs!
Give me my life, give me my liberty,
My good name and my civic rights again!
It would be too fond, too complacent play
Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
The game here, I for God: a soldier-bee
That yields his life, exenterate[1] with the stroke
O' the sting that saves the hive. I need that life.

Oh, never fear! I'll find life plenty use
Though it should last five years more, aches and all!
For, first thing, there's the mother's age to help—
Let her come break her heart upon my breast,
Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb!
The fugitive brother has to be bidden back
To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
Of daily suit and service to the Church,—
Thro' gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung!
Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home,
The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
A victor in the battle of this world!
Give me—for last, best gift—my son again,
Whom law makes mine,—I take him at your word,
Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
Let me lift up his youth and innocence
To purify my palace, room by room
Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
Then may we,—strong from that rekindled smile,—
Go forward, face new times, the better day.
And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now,—might but Utopia be!—
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
Customs that recognize the standard worth,—
The wholesome household rule in force again,
Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial, with no aim
At leading silly women captive, but
Of rising to such duties as yours now,—
Then will I set my son at my right-hand
And tell his father's story to this point,

[1] *Exenterate:* disembowelled.

Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still
"I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
"And they approved of me: give praise to both!"
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat,—
I engage to smile "That was an accident
"I' the necessary process,—just a trip
"O' the torture-irons in their search for truth,—
"Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.—GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

ANSWER you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago: 'twas here, I do believe,
Fronting you same three in this very room,
I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,
Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did,
As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
Laughter — no levity, nothing indecorous, lords!
Only,—I think I apprehend the mood:
There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth,
The titter stifled in the hollow palm
Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,
When I first told my tale: they meant, you know,
"The sly one, all this we are bound believe!
"Well, he can say no other than what he says.
"We have been young, too,—come, there's greater guilt!
"Let him but decently disembroil himself,
"Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud,—
"We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!"
And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast
As if I were a phantom: now 'tis—"Friend,
"Collect yourself!"—no laughing matter more—
"Counsel the Court in this extremity,
"Tell us again!"—tell that, for telling which,
I got the jocular piece of punishment,
Was sent to lounge a little in the place
Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
To take the intelligence from just—your lips!
You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
That she I helped eight months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same,
Three days ago, if I have seized your sense,—
(I being disallowed to interfere,
Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
For you and law were guardians quite enough
O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)—
And that he has butchered her accordingly,
As she foretold and as myself believed,—
And, so foretelling and believing so,
We were punished, both of us, the merry way:
Therefore, tell once again the tale! For what?
Pompilia is only dying while I speak!
Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?
My masters, there's an old book, you should con
For strange adventures, applicable yet,
'Tis stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
This thing: a multitude of worthy folk
Took recreation, watched a certain group
Of soldiery intent upon a game,—
How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,
Threw dice,—the best diversion in the world.
A word in your ear,—they are now casting lots,
Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,

For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!
I am a priest,—talk of what I have learned.
Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,
Gasping away the latest breath of all,
This minute, while I talk—not while you laugh?

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask
By way of explanation? There's the fact!
It seems to fill the universe with sight
And sound,—from the four corners of this earth
Tells itself over, to my sense at least.
But you may want it lower set i' the scale,—
Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps;
You'd stand back just to comprehend it more.
Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
The mystery of this murder. God above!
It is too paltry, such a transference
O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!

This deed, you saw begin—why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain?
This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
Was this man to be favoured, now, or feared,
Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
In the relation with Pompilia? Say!
Did any other man need interpose
—Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that's near
To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world—
Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower,
Keep the straight path and let the victim die?
I held so; you decided otherwise,
Saw no such peril, therefore no such need
To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path. Law,
Law was aware and watching, would suffice,
Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge!
Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
Kicked for his pains to kennel; I gave place
To you, and let the law reign paramount:
I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me—there and thus she lies!

Men, for the last time, what do you want with me?
Is it,—you acknowledge, as it were, a use,
A profit in employing me?—at length
I may conceivably help the august law?
I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
On next dove, nor miss much of good repute?
Or what if this your summons, after all,
Be but the form of mere release, no more,
Which turns the key and lets the captive go?
I have paid enough in person at Civita,
Am free,—what more need I concern me with?
Thank you! I am rehabilitated then,
A very reputable priest. But she—
The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
The splendour of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, . does no one move?
Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and splendour, still say I,
Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendour, solely at their source,
God,—have thus recognized my food in her,
You tell me, that's fast dying while we talk,
Pompilia! How does lenity to me,
Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come, smile!
The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,
The mundane love that's sin and scandal too!

You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems :
It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
Chop-fallen, — understands how law might take
Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand,
In good part. Better late than never, law
You understand of a sudden, gospel too
Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
That I endeavoured to save Pompilia ?

Then,
You were wrong, you see : that's well to see, though late :
That's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave : his good is—knowing he is bad :
Thus will it be with us when the books ope
And we stand at the bar on judgment-day.
Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,
Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
I heard, last time I stood here to be judged,
What is priest's-duty,—labour to pluck tares
And weed the corn of Molinism ; let me
Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
Mindful of Christ or marching step by step
With . . . what's his style, the other potentate
Who bids have courage and keep honour safe,
Nor let minuter admonition tease ?—
How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no !
For you and the others like you sure to come,
Fresh work is sure to follow,—wickedness
That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
Many a man of guile will clamour yet,
Bid you redress his grievance,—as he clutched
The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between,
And there's the good gripe in pure waste ! My part
Is done ; i' the doing it, I pass away
Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
For a moment, show Pompilia who was true !
Not for her sake, but yours : if she is dead,
Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
Most or least priestly ! Saints, to do us good,
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand ;
We never find them saints before, at least.
Be her first prayer then presently for you—
She has done the good to me . . .
What is all this ?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool !
This is a foolish outset :—might with cause
Give colour to the very lie o' the man,
The murderer,—make as if I loved his wife,
In the way he called love. He is the fool there !
Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy
As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
Or no, not her !—not even if any of you
Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
That's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Lie,—if he does, let him ! I mean to say,
So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her
The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
I too am taintless, and I bare my breast.
You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen !

Why, good and wise you are !
You might at the beginning stop my mouth :
So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
I talk impertinently, and you bear,
All the same. This it is to have to do

With honest hearts: they easily may err,
But in the main they wish well to the truth.
You are Christians; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
I shall go on now. Does she need or not
I keep calm? Calm I'll keep as monk that croons
Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.
Not one word more from the point now!

I begin.
Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
Also I am a younger son o' the House
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
Arezzo, I recognize no equal there—
(I want all arguments, all sorts of arms
That seem to serve,—use this for a reason, wait!)
Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame
Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor:
When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
Migrated to the victor-city, and there
Flourished,—our palace and our tower attest,
In the Old Mercato,—this was years ago,
Four hundred, full,—no, it wants fourteen just.
Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
The shield quartered with white and red: a branch
Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
That were good help to the Church? But better still—
Not simply for the advantage of my birth
I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest;
But because there's an illustration, late
I' the day, that's loved and looked to as a saint
Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of,
Sixty years since: he spent to the last doit
His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
And used to tend the needy and the sick,
Barefoot, because of his humility.
He it was,—when the Granduke Ferdinand[1]
Swore he would raze our city, plough the place
And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
The statue of his father from its base
For hate's sake,—he availed by prayers and tears
To pacify the Duke and save the town.
This was my father's father's brother. You see,
For his sake, how it was I had a right
To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
Was made expect, from infancy almost,
The proper mood o' the priest; till time ran by
And brought the day when I must read the vows,
Declare the world renounced and undertake
To become priest and leave probation,—leap
Over the ledge into the other life,
Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read!

I stopped short awe-struck. "How shall holiest flesh
"Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
"How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
"Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"
And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
In its mid-protestation. "Incapable?
"Qualmish of conscience? Thou ingenuous boy!
"Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far!
"I satisfy thee there's an easier sense
"Wherein to take such vow than suits the first

[1] *Ferdinand:* Ferdinand II., Grand-duke of Tuscany 1621–1670, one of the Medici.

"Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
"Nay, has been even a solace to myself!
"The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue,
"Utter sometimes the holy name of God,
"A thing their superstition boggles at,
"Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct,—
"How does their shrewdness help them? In this wise;
"Another set of sounds they substitute,
"Jumble so consonants and vowels—how
"Should I know?—that there grows from out the old
"Quite a new word that means the very same—
"And o'er the hard place slide they with a smile.
"Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
"Nobody wants you in these latter days
"To prop the Church by breaking your back-bone,—
"As the necessary way was once, we know,
"When Diocletian flourished and his like.
"That building of the buttress-work was done
"By martyrs and confessors: let it bide,
"Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
"Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
"Shall make amends and beautify the pile!
"We profit as you were the painfullest
"O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
"For the cruelest confessor ever was,
"If you march boldly up and take your stand
"Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil,
"And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free
"'And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
"'Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
"'But the grand old Church: she tempts me of the two!'
"Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
"Let us have you, and boast of what you bring.
"We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
"Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
"In soul and body. There's a rubble-stone
"Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow
"In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight;
"There's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack!
"Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
"Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
"He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
"Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use.
"I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
"Close under lock and key, kept at his task
"Of letting Fénelon know the fool he is,
"In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
"Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
"As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
"Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
"He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
"But you, who are so quite another paste
"Of a man,—do you obey me? Cultivate
"Assiduous that superior gift you have
"Of making madrigals—(who told me? Ah!)
"Get done a Marinesque Adoniad[1] straight
"With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
"That I may tell the lady 'And he's ours!"

So I became a priest: those terms changed all,
I was good enough for that, nor cheated so;
I could live thus and still hold head erect.
Now you see why I may have been before
A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word
Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,

[1] *A Marinesque Adoniad:* alluding to the *Adone* of Giovanni Battista Marin (or Marini), published in 1623, and very popular during the seventeenth century.

According to prescription did I live,
—Conformed myself, both read the breviary
And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
I' the Pieve,[1] and as diligent at my post
Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,
Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority
For delicate play at tarocs,[2] and arbiter
O' the magnitude of fan-mounts: all the while
Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
Benignant to the promising pupil,—thus:
"Enough attention to the Countess now,
"The young one; 'tis her mother rules the roast,
"We know where, and puts in a word: go pay
"Devoir to-morrow morning after mass!
"Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week!
"Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
"And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace
"No soul dares treat the subject of the day
"Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha!)
"Five years ago,—when somebody could help
"And touch up an odd phrase in time of need,
"(He, he!)—and somebody helps you, my son!
"Therefore, don't prove so indispensable
"At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
"A fixture by attendance morn and eve!
"Arezzo's just a haven midway Rome—
"Rome's the eventual harbour,—make for port,
"Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
"A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
"At will, and tact at every pore of you!
"I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,
"And Father Slouch, our piece of piety,
"To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal.

"Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in hand,
"And ever since 'tis meat for man and maid
"How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent pate
"Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need,
"Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts,
"There's nothing moves his Eminence so much
"As—far from all this awe at sanctitude—
"Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
"At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue
"A lady learns so much by, we know where.
"Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule
"For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
"Permissible only to Catullus! There!
"Now go to duty: brisk, break Priscian's head[3]
"By reading the day's office—there's no help.
"You've Ovid in your poke to plaster that;
"Amen's at the end of all: then sup with me!"

Well, after three or four years of this life,
In prosecution of my calling, I
Found myself at the theatre one night
With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
Proper enough for the place, amused or no:
When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.
It was as when, in our cathedral once,
As I got yawningly through matin-song,
I saw *facchini*[4] bear a burden up,
Base it on the high-altar, break away
A board or two, and leave the thing inside
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,
There was the Rafael! I was still one stare,
When—"Nay, I'll make her give you back your gaze"—
Said Canon Conti; and at the word he tossed
A paper-twist of comfits to her lap,

[1] *Pieve:* Sta. Maria della Pieve, one of the principal churches in Arezzo.
[2] *Tarocs:* a card game.
[3] *Break Priscian's head:* break the rules of classical Latin grammar, on which Priscian was the most famous ancient authority.
[4] *Facchini:* porters.

And dodged and in a trice was at my back
Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
"Is not she fair? 'Tis my new cousin," said he:
"The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box
"Is Guido, the old scapegrace: she's his wife,
"Married three years since: how his Countship sulks!
"He has brought little back from Rome beside,
"After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
"And—they do say—a pocketful of gold
"When he can worry both her parents dead.
"I don't go much there, for the chamber's cold
"And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
"Paying my duty: I observed they crouched
"—The two old frightened family spectres—close
"In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
"I' the cat's cage: ever since, I stay at home.
"Hallo, there's Guido, the black, mean and small,
"Bends his brows on us—please to bend your own
"On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there
"By way of a diversion! I was a fool
"To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love!
"To-morrow I'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
"Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,
And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
I' the choir,—part said, part sung—"*In ex-cel-sis*—
"All's to no purpose; I have louted low,
"But he saw you staring—*quia sub*—don't incline
"To know you nearer: him we would not hold
"For Hercules,—the man would lick your shoe
"If you and certain efficacious friends
"Managed him warily,—but there's the wife:
"Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
"She's breaking her heart quite fast enough—*jam tu*—
"So, be you rational and make amends
"With little Light-skirts yonder—*in secula*
"*Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum.* Ah, you rogue! Every one knows
"What great dame she makes jealous: one against one,
"Play, and win both!"
Sirs, ere the week was out,
I saw and said to myself "Light-skirts hides teeth
"Would make a dog sick,—the great dame shows spite
"Should drive a cat mad: 'tis but poor work this—
"Counting one's fingers till the sonnet's crowned.
"I doubt much if Marino really be
"A better bard than Dante after all.
"'Tis more amusing to go pace at eve
"I' the Duomo,—watch the day's last gleam outside
"Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
"Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle,—
"Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
"Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
"Who cares to look will find me in my stall
"At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least—
"Never to write a canzonet any more."

So, next week, 'twas my patron spoke abrupt,
In altered guise. "Young man, can it be true
"That after all your promise of sound fruit,
"You have kept away from Countess young or old
"And gone play truant in church all day long?

"Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick:
"Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
"The fact is, I am troubled in my mind,
"Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
"This your Arezzo is a limited world;
"There's a strange Pope,—'tis said, a priest who thinks.
"Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
"I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,
"And look into my heart a little." "Lent
"Ended,"—I told friends—"I shall go to Rome."

One evening I was sitting in a muse
Over the opened "Summa,"[1] darkened round
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life
Had shaken under me,—broke short indeed
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be,—
And into what abysm the soul may slip,
Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes—
Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,
How utterly dissociated was I
A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
Of Guido,—just as an instance to the point,
Nought more,—how I had a whole store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help,—
And yet there was no way in the wide world
To stretch out mine and so relieve myself,—
How when the page o' the Summa preached its best,
Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
The silence we could break by no one word,—
There came a tap without the chamber-door,
And a whisper; when I bade who tapped speak out.

[1] *Summa:* the *Summa Theologiæ* of Thomas Aquinas.

And, in obedience to my summons, last
In glided a masked muffled mystery,
Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect
That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
And gave it,—loved me and confessed it thus,
And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
Going that night to such a side o' the house
Where the small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
Her husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa of Vittiano.

"And you?"—I asked:
"What may you be?" "Count Guido's kind of maid—
"Most of us have two functions in his house.
"We all hate him, the lady suffers much,
"'Tis just we show compassion, furnish help,
"Specially since her choice is fixed so well.
"What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet
"Pompilia?"

Then I took a pen and wrote
"No more of this! That you are fair, I know:
"But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
"I should not thus have played the insensible
"Once on a time. What made you,—may one ask,—
"Marry your hideous husband? 'Twas a fault,
"And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell."

"There!" smiled I as she snatched it and was gone—
"There, let the jealous miscreant,—Guido's self,
"Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick,—
"Be baulked so far, defrauded of his aim!
"What fund of satisfaction to the knave,

"Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs,
"Trussed to the middle of her impudence,
"And set his heart at ease so! No, indeed!
"There's the reply which he shall turn and twist
"At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,
"As the bear does when he finds a scented glove
"That puzzles him,—a hand and yet no hand,
"Of other perfume than his own foul paw!
"Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
"Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
"The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
"Prepared myself to pull the appointer's self
"Out of the window from his hiding-place
"Behind the gown of this part-messenger
"Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
"Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
"Now I am not i' the mood."
Back next morn brought
The messenger, a second letter in hand.
"You are cruel, Thyrsis, and Myrtilla moans
"Neglected but adores you, makes request
"For mercy: why is it you dare not come?
"Such virtue is scarce natural to your age.
"You must love someone else; I hear you do,
"The Baron's daughter or the Advocate's wife,
"Or both,—all's one, would you make me the third—
"I take the crumbs from table gratefully
"Nor grudge who feasts there. 'Faith, I blush and blaze!
"Yet if I break all bounds, there's reason sure.
"Are you determinedly bent on Rome?
"I am wretched here, a monster tortures me:
"Carry me with you! Come and say you will!
"Concert this very evening! Do not write!
"I am ever at the window of my room
"Over the terrace, at the *Ave.* Come!"
I questioned—lifting half the woman's mask
To let her smile loose. "So, you gave my line
"To the merry lady?" "She kissed off the wax,
"And put what paper was not kissed away,
"In her bosom to go burn: but merry, no!
"She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
"Alone, the unkind missive at her breast;
"Thus Philomel, the thorn at her breast too,
"Sings" . . . "Writes this second letter?"
"Even so!
"Then she may peep at vespers forth?"—
"What risk
"Do we run o' the husband?"—"Ah,—no risk at all!
"He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah—
"That was the reason? Why, the man's away!
"Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours,
"Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him,
"How should he dream of you? I told you truth:
"He goes to the villa at Vittiano—'tis
"The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine—
"Spends the night there. And then his wife's a child:
"Does he think a child outwits him? A mere child:
"Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke.
"Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come!"

I wrote "In vain do you solicit me.
"I am a priest: and you are wedded wife,
"Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.
"I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
"Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!
"My thoughts are elsewhere." "Take her that!"
"Again
"Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,

"Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart
"His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!
"Let him watch shivering at the window—ay,
"And let this hybrid, this his light-of-love
"And lackey-of-lies,—a sage economy,—
"Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin,—
"Let her report and make him chuckle o'er
"The break-down of my resolution now,
"And lour at disappointment in good time!
"—So tantalize and so enrage by turns,
"Until the two fall each on the other like
"Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly
"That toys long, leaves their net and them at last!"
And so the missives followed thick and fast
For a month, say,—I still came at every turn
On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread.
I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word
'Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.
A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail,
As I passed, by day, the very window once.
And ever from corners would be peering up
The messenger, with the self-same demand
"Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant?
"Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe
"O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"
And ever my one answer in one tone—
"Go your ways, temptress! Let a priest read, pray,
"Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him!
"In the end, you'll have your will and ruin me!"

One day, a variation: thus I read:
"You have gained little by timidity.
"My husband has found out my love at length,
"Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse,
"And you the game he covered, poor fat soul!
"My husband is a formidable foe,
"Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand
"Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!
"I bade you visit me, when the last place
"My tyrant would have turned suspicious at,
"Or cared to seek you in, was . . . why say, where?
"But now all's changed: beside, the season's past
"At the villa,—wants the master's eye no more.
"Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
"From the window! He might well be posted there."

I wrote—"You raise my courage, or call up
"My curiosity, who am but man.
"Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
"Under—that's his and yours and mine alike.
"If it should please me pad the path this eve,
"Guido will have two troubles, first to get
"Into a rage and then get out again.
"Be cautious, though: at the *Ave!*"
You of the Court!
When I stood question here and reached this point
O' the narrative,—search notes and see and say
If someone did not interpose with smile
And sneer, "And prithee why so confident
"That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
"Fabricate thus,—what if the lady loved?
"What if she wrote the letters?"
Learned Sir,
I told you there's a picture in our church.
Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point,
A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe,
And then said "See a thing that Rafael made—
"This venom issued from Madonna's mouth!"
I should reply, "Rather, the soul of you

"Has issued from your body, like from like,
"By way of the ordure-corner!"
But no less,
I tired of the same long black teasing lie
Obtruded thus at every turn; the pest
Was far too near the picture, anyhow:
One does Madonna service, making clowns
Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy.
"I will to the window, as he tempts," said I:
"Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
"This new bait of adventure tempts,—thinks he.
"Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
"There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,
"Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
"No mother nor brother viper of the brood
"Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!"

So I went: crossed street and street: "The next street's turn,
"I stand beneath the terrace, see, above,
"The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
"Of hand's throw of soft prelude over lute,
"And cough that clears way for the ditty last,"—
I began to laugh already—"he will have
"'Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
"'Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
"'Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
"'And after, take this foulness in your face!'"

The words lay living on my lip, I made
The one-turn more—and there at the window stood,
Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
Pompilia; the same great, grave, griefful air
As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt—
Assured myself that she was flesh and blood—
She had looked one look and vanished.
I thought—"Just so:
"It was herself, they have set her there to watch—
"Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
"On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,
"Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
"And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
"She never dreams they used her for a snare,
"And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.
"Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse!"
And on my lip again was—"Out with thee,
"Guido!" When all at once she re-appeared;
But, this time, on the terrace overhead,
So close above me, she could almost touch
My head if she bent down; and she did bend,
While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began—"You have sent me letters, Sir:
"I have read none, I can neither read nor write;
"But she you gave them to, a woman here,
"One of the people in whose power I am,
"Partly explained their sense, I think, to me
"Obliged to listen while she inculcates
"That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,
"Desire to live or die as I shall bid,
"(She makes me listen if I will or no)
"Because you saw my face a single time.
"It cannot be she says the thing you mean;
"Such wickedness were deadly to us both:
"But good true love would help me now so much—
"I tell myself, you may mean good and true.
"You offer me, I seem to understand,
"Because I am in poverty and starve,
"Much money, where one piece would save my life.
"The silver cup upon the altar-cloth
"Is neither yours to give nor mine to take;
"But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
"Since I am starving, and return the rest,
"Yet do no harm: this is my very case.
"I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
"From so much of assistance as would bring
"The guilt of theft on neither you nor me;
"But no superfluous particle of aid.
"I think, if you will let me state my case,
"Even had you been so fancy-fevered here,

"Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now—
"Care only to bestow what I can take.
"That it is only you in the wide world,
"Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,
"Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
"Come proffering assistance now, — were strange
"But that my whole life is so strange: as strange
"It is, my husband whom I have not wronged
"Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake,
"Hinder the harm! But there is something more,
"And that the strangest: it has got to be
"Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
"—This is a riddle—for some kind of sake
"Not any clearer to myself than you,
"And yet as certain as that I draw breath,—
"I would fain live, not die—oh no, not die!
"My case is, I was dwelling happily
"At Rome with those dear Comparini, called
"Father and mother to me; when at once
"I found I had become Count Guido's wife:
"Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
"Into a fury of fire, if once he was
"Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,
"He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
"All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
"Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
"In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
"Burning not only present life but past,
"Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
"He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,
"My father once, my mother all those years,
"That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
"And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs,
"Never in all the time their child at all.
"Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
"Just so I say of you that proffer help:
"I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
"I simply needs must see that it is so,
"Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
"They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
"All the old love up, till my husband, till
"His people here so tortured them, they fled.
"And now, is it because I grow in flesh
"And spirit one with him their torturer,
"That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
"If I were graced by God to have a child,
"Could I one day deny God graced me so?
"Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break
"No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
"By using—letting have effect so much
"Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate
"Would take my life which I want and must have—
"Just as I take from your excess of love
"Enough to save my life with, all I need.
"The Archbishop said to murder me were sin:
"My leaving Guido were a kind of death
"With no sin,—more death, he must answer for.
"Hear now what death to him and life to you
"I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome!
"You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
"Take me as you would take a dog, I think,
"Masterless left for strangers to maltreat:
"Take me home like that—leave me in the house
"Where the father and the mother are; and soon
"They'll come to know and call me by my name,
"Their child once more, since child I am, for all
"They now forget me, which is the worst o' the dream—
"And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand,
"Walk, go: then help me to stand, walk and go!

"The Governor said the strong should help the weak:
"You know how weak the strongest women are.
"How could I find my way there by myself?
"I cannot even call out, make them hear—
"Just as in dreams: I have tried and proved the fact.
"I have told this story and more to good great men,
"The Archbishop and the Governor: they smiled.
"'Stop your mouth, fair one!'—presently they frowned,
"'Get you gone, disengage you from our feet!'
"I went in my despair to an old priest,
"Only a friar, no great man like these two,
"But good, the Augustinian, people name
"Romano,—he confessed me two months since:
"He fears God, why then needs he fear the world?
"And when he questioned how it came about
"That I was found in danger of a sin—
"Despair of any help from providence,—
"'Since, though your husband outrage you,' said he,
"'That is a case too common, the wives die
"'Or live, but do not sin so deep as this'—
"Then I told—what I never will tell you—
"How, worse than husband's hate, I had to bear
"The love,—soliciting to shame called love,—
"Of his brother,—the young idle priest i' the house
"With only the devil to meet there. 'This is grave—
"'Yes, we must interfere: I counsel,—write
"'To those who used to be your parents once,
"'Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence!'
"'But,' said I, 'when I neither read nor write?'
"'Then he took pity and promised 'I will write.'
"If he did so,—why, they are dumb or dead:
"Either they give no credit to the tale,
"Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
"Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
"I' the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
"All such extravagance and dreadfulness
"Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way,—
"Wake me! The letter I received this morn,
"Said—if the woman spoke your very sense—
"'You would die for me:' I can believe it now:
"For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
"First of all, you seemed wicked and not good,
"In writing me those letters: you came in
"Like a thief upon me. I this morning said
"In my extremity, entreat the thief!
"Try if he have in him no honest touch!
"A thief might save me from a murderer.
"'Twas a thief said the last kind word to Christ:
"Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft:
"And so did I prepare what I now say.
"But now, that you stand and I see your face,
"Though you have never uttered word yet, —well, I know,
"Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
"And that at no time, you with the eyes here,
"Ever intended to do wrong by me,
"Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,
"And you are true, have been true, will be true.
"To Rome then,—when is it you take me there?
"Each minute lost is mortal. When?—I ask."

I answered "It shall be when it can be.
"I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
"The sure and speedy means of travel, then
"Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
"There wants a carriage, money and the rest,—

"A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
"How shall I see you and assure escape?"

She replied, "Pass, to-morrow at this hour.
"If I am at the open window, well:
"If I am absent, drop a handkerchief
"And walk by! I shall see from where I watch,
"And know that all is done. Return next eve,
"And next, and so till we can meet and speak!"
"To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.
She was withdrawn.

Here is another point
I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
Someone said, subtly, "Here at least was found
"Your confidence in error,—you perceived
"The spirit of the letters, in a sort,
"Had been the lady's, if the body should be
"Supplied by Guido: say, he forged them all!
"Here was the unforged fact—she sent for you,
"Spontaneously elected you to help,
"—What men call, loved you: Guido read her mind,
"Gave it expression to assure the world
"The case was just as he foresaw: he wrote,
"She spoke."

Sirs, that first simile serves still,—
That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say,
Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
Go on! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
On my face as I flung me at her feet:
Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest,
Would that prove the first lying tale was true?
Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
Accepted my own fact, my miracle
Self-authorized and self-explained,—she chose
To summon me and signify her choice.
Afterward,—oh! I gave a passing glance
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon
Out now to tolerate no darkness more,
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass
For truth and solid, not an empty lie:
"So, he not only forged the words for her
"But words for me, made letters he called mine:
"What I sent, he retained, gave these in place,
"All by the mistress-messenger! As I
"Recognized her, at potency of truth,
"So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
"Never mistook the signs. Enough of this—
"Let the wraith go to nothingness again,
"Here is the orb, have only thought for her!"

"Thought?" nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both,—
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought,—powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished—the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
Soar to the sky,—die well and you do that.
The very immolation made the bliss;
Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil
Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:
As if the intense centre of the flame
Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly

Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
Saint Thomas[1] with his sober grey goose-quill,
And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,[2]
Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
Into another state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness: so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the grey of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve—mine,
My church: it seemed to say for the first time
"But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
"O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
"To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
"And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
"This is a fleshly woman,—let the free
"Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!"
See! Day by day I had risen and left this church
At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
With half a curse and half a pitying smile
For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
Intent on his *corona:* then the church
Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
To quicken my pace nor stop for prating—
"There!
"Be thankful you are no such ninny, go
"Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards
"Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
"Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!"

[1] *Saint Thomas:* Aquinas. *See* note on l. 484.
[2] *Cephisian reed:* the reeds of Cephisus, one of the rivers of Athens.

That sort of incentive! Now the church changed tone—
Now, when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
Indisputably mistress of the man
Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:
Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scrannel voice
"Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!"
As if, i' the fabled garden,[3] I had gone
On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,
Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
And scorned the achievement: then come all at once
O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,
The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,—
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady,—to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'Twas God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said
"We two are cognisant o' the Master now;
"She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
"I am a priest! I see the function here;
"I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
"This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
"I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I—
I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
The sun slanted into my room, had reached
The west. I opened book,—Aquinas blazed
With one black name only on the white page.
I looked up, saw the sunset: vespers rang:

[3] *The fabled garden:* of the Hesperides, where the golden apple was guarded by a dragon.

"She counts the minutes till I keep my word
"And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
"Duty to God is duty to her: I think
"God, who created her, will save her too
"Some new way, by one miracle the more,
"Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
The office: I was back at home again
Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know—but know
"That, were there good in this distinct from God's,
"Really good as it reached her, though procured
"By a sin of mine,—I should sin: God forgives.
"She knows it is no fear withholds me: fear?
"Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
"If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
"On the fantastic notion that I fear
"The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
"Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies,
"May wait the work, attend the effect,—I fear
"The sword of Guido! Let God see to that—
"Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"

Again the morning found me. "I will work,
"Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far!
"I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues
"Had broken else into a cackle and hiss
"Around the noble name. Duty is still
"Wisdom: I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening—"But, achieving victory,
"I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,
"Nor shrink to counsel, comfort: priest and friend—
"How do we discontinue to be friends?
"I will go minister, advise her seek
"Help at the source,—above all, not despair:
"There may be other happier help at hand.
"I hope it,—wherefore then neglect to say?"

There she stood—leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke:
"Why is it you have suffered me to stay
"Breaking my heart two days more than was need?
"Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give?
"You are again here, in the self-same mind,
"I see here, steadfast in the face of you,—
"You grudge to do no one thing that I ask.
"Why then is nothing done? You know my need.
"Still, through God's pity on me, there is time
"And one day more: shall I be saved or no?"
I answered—"Lady, waste no thought, no word
"Even to forgive me! Care for what I care—
"Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
"Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
"Just before daybreak:—there's new moon this eve—
"It sets, and then begins the solid black.
"Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
"Over the low dilapidated wall,
"Take San Clemente, there's no other gate
"Unguarded at the hour: some paces thence
"An inn stands; cross to it; I shall be there."

She answered, "If I can but find the way.
"But I shall find it. Go now!"

I did go,
Took rapidly the route myself prescribed,
Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
Proved that the gate was practicable, reached
The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss,
Knocked there and entered, made the host secure:
"With Caponsacchi it is ask and have;

"I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome?
"I get swift horse and trusty man," said he.

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more
In my own house for the last time: there lay
The broad pale opened Summa. "Shut his book,
"There's other showing! 'Twas a Thomas too
"Obtained,—more favoured than his name-sake here,—
"A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt,—
"Our Lady's girdle; down he saw it drop
"As she ascended into heaven, they say:
"He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.
"I too have seen a lady and hold a grace."

I know not how the night passed: morning broke;
Presently came my servant. "Sir, this eve—
"Do you forget?" I started. "How forget?
"What is it you know?" "With due submission, Sir,
"This being last Monday in the month but one
"And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George,
"And feast day, and moreover day for copes,
"And Canon Conti now away a month,
"And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,
"You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt
"Of the octave . . . Well, Sir, 'tis important!"
"True!
"Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.
"No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst!
"Provide me with a laic dress! Throw dust
"I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so!
"See there's a sword in case of accident."
I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus
Through each familiar hindrance of the day
Did I make steadily for its hour and end,—
Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
Let speed the special service,—and I sped
Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
There was I at the goal, before the gate,
With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
Ever some spiritual witness new and new
In faster frequence, crowding solitude
To watch the way o' the warfare,—till, at last,
When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,
Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
Certainly, for the body was one black,
Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
Glided into the carriage,—so a cloud
Gathers the moon up. "By San Spirito,
"To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
"Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
"The run and the risk to heart's content!"
Just that
I said,—then, in another tick of time,
Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight thro' dusk to clear,
Through day and night and day again to night
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.
Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain,—as God's sea, glassed in gold,
His saints,—the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,

You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?
Calmly! Each incident
Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch
O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth
To idiots who name Parian—coprolite.
After all, I shall give no glare—at best·
Only display you certain scattered lights
Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:
Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks
Wavelet from wavelet: well!
For the first hour
We both were silent in the night, I know:
Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
Blackness engulphed me,—partial stupor, say—
Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise,
And be aware again, and see who sat
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
I said to myself—"I have caught it, I conceive
"The mind o' the mystery: 'tis the way they wake
"And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb
"Each by each as their blessing was to die;
"Some signal they are promised and expect,—
"When to arise before the trumpet scares:
"So, through the whole course of the world they wait
"The last day, but so fearless and so safe!
"No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
"I lie, because she lies too by my side."
You know this is not love, Sirs,—it is faith,
The feeling that there's God, he reigns and rules
Out of this low world: that is all; no harm!
At times she drew a soft sigh—music seemed
Always to hover just above her lips,
Not settle,—break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found
Her head erect, her face turned full to me,
Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.
I answered them. "You are saved hitherto.
"We have passed Perugia,—gone round by the wood,
"Not through, I seem to think,—and opposite
"I know Assisi; this is holy ground."
Then she resumed. "How long since we both left
"Arezzo?" "Years—and certain hours beside."

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
'Tis a mere post-house and a hovel or two;
I left the carriage and got bread and wine
And brought it her. "Does it detain to eat?"
"They stay perforce, change horses,—therefore eat!
"We lose no minute: we arrive, be sure!"
This was—I know not where—there's a great hill
Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge,
One fords it. She began—"I have heard say
"Of some sick body that my mother knew,
"'Twas no good sign when in a limb diseased
"All the pain suddenly departs,—as if
"The guardian angel discontinued pain
"Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
"The limb will not again exert itself,
"It needs be pained no longer: so with me,
"—My soul whence all the pain is past at once:
"All pain must be to work some good in the end.
"True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
"Pain was because of,—otherwise, I fear!"

She said,—a long while later in the day,
When I had let the silence be,—abrupt—

"Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born."
"A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it—
"What woman were you used to serve this way,
"Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
I did not like that word. Soon afterward—
"Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind
"Of mere unhappiness at being men,
"As women suffer, being womanish?
"Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,
"Born of what may be man's strength overmuch,
"To match the undue susceptibility,
"The sense at every pore when hate is close?
"It hurts us if a baby hides its face
"Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
"Or makes a mouth,—much more if stranger men
"Laugh or frown,—just as that were much to bear!
"Yet rocks split,—and the blow-ball does no more,
"Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch;
"And strength may have its drawback weakness 'scapes."

Once she asked "What is it that made you smile,
"At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes,
"Where the company entered, 'tis a long time since?"
"—Forgive—I think you would not understand:
"Ah, but you ask me,—therefore, it was this.
"That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
"I knew it by the eagles,—and at once
"Remembered this same bishop was just he
"People of old were wont to bid me please
"If I would catch preferment: so, I smiled
"Because an impulse came to me, a whim—
"What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak,
"Began upon him in his presence-hall
"—'What, still at work so grey and obsolete?
"'Still rocheted and mitred more or less?
"'Don't you feel all that out of fashion now?
"'I find out when the day of things is done!'"

At eve we heard the *angelus:* she turned—
"I told you I can neither read nor write.
"My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
"If I begin to live again: but you—
"Who are a priest—wherefore do you not read
"The service at this hour? Read Gabriel's song,
"The lesson, and then read the little prayer
"To Raphael, proper for us travellers!"
I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark.
The people of the post came out with lights:
The driver said, "This time to-morrow, may
"Saints only help, relays continue good,
"Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome."
I urged, "Why tax your strength a second night?
"Trust me, alight here and take brief repose!
"We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit: go sleep
"If but an hour! I keep watch, guard the while
"Here in the doorway." But her whole face changed,
The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
The probing spear o' the huntsman. "Oh, no stay!"
She cried, in the fawn's cry, "On to Rome, on, on—
"Unless 'tis you who fear,—which cannot be!"

We did go on all night; but at its close
She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream:

Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
Waved away something—"Never again with you!
"My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:
"You and I are divided ever more
"In soul and body: get you gone!" Then I—
"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
"Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
"Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
"Let God arise and all his enemies
"Be scattered!" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last,
I answered the first look—"Scarce twelve hours more,
"Then, Rome! There probably was no pursuit,
"There cannot now be peril: bear up brave!
"Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize:
"Then, no more of the terrible journey!"
"Then,
"No more o' the journey: if it might but last!
"Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
"It is the interruption that I dread,—
"With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
"Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
"Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
"Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
"No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat, "Descend!"
I told a woman, at the garden-gate
By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
"It is my sister,—talk with her apart!
"She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
"I take her home because her head is hurt;
"Comfort her as you women understand!"
So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
Came back, and there she sat: close to her knee,
A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,
Wondered to see how little she could drink,
And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
She smiled at me "How much good this has done!
"This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
"I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.
"How do you call that tree with the thick top
"That holds in all its leafy green and gold
"The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"
(It was a million-leaved mimosa.) "Take
"The babe away from me and let me go!"
And in the carriage "Still a day, my friend!
"And perhaps half a night, the woman fears.
"I pray it finish since it cannot last:
"There may be more misfortune at the close,
"And where will you be? God suffice me then!"
And presently—for there was a roadside-shrine—
"When I was taken first to my own church
"Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
"And bid confess my faults, I interposed
"'But teach me what fault to confess and know!'
"So, the priest said—'You should bethink yourself:
"'Each human being needs must have done wrong!'
"Now, be you candid and no priest but friend—
"Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,
"A runaway from husband and his home,
"Do you account it were in sin I died?
"My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
"Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
"Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
"But as I heard him bid a farming-man
"At the villa take a lamb once to the wood

"And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
"Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
"Enticed to the trap: he practised thus with me
"That so, whatever were his gain thereby,
"Others than I might become prey and spoil.
"Had it been only between our two selves,—
"His pleasure and my pain,—why, pleasure him
"By dying, nor such need to make a coil!
"But this was worth an effort, that my pain
"Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold
"To other people—strangers—or unborn—
"How should I know? I sought release from that—
"I think, or else from,—dare I say, some cause
"Such as is put into a tree, which turns
"Away from the north wind with what nest it holds,—
"The woman said that trees so turn: now, friend,
"Tell me, because I cannot trust myself!
"You are a man: what have I done amiss?"
You must conceive my answer,—I forget—
Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,
This time she might have said,—might, did not say—
"You are a priest." She said, "my friend."
Day wore,
We passed the places, somehow the calm went,
Again the restless eyes began to rove
In new fear of the foe mine could not see.
She wandered in her mind,—addressed me once
"Gaetano!"[1]—that is not my name: whose name?
I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.
"Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
"Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
"The plenitude of quiet,—help us, God,
"Whom the winds carry!"
Suddenly I saw
The old tower, and the little white-walled clump
Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two,—
"Already Castelnuovo—Rome!" I cried,
"As good as Rome,—Rome is the next stage, think!
"This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
"Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
The sky was fierce with colour from the sun
Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die!
"Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
"I have more life to save than mine!"
She swooned.
We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so?
Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia,—bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent "Let her stay an hour or two!
"Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened,—not one movement, not one sigh.
"Fear not: she sleeps so sound!" they said: but I
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn.—"Reach Rome,
"Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
"Another long breath, and we emerge!" I stood

[1] *Gaetano: see* Book VII. ll. 100–105.

I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms.
"Have out
"Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!"
said I.
While they made ready in the doubtful morn,—
'Twas the last minute,—needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.
And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master,—took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world: there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp. Soon triumph suppled the tongue
A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
And he part howled, part hissed . . . oh, how he kept
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare!—
"My salutation to your priestship! What?
"Matutinal, busy with book so soon
"Of an April day that's damp as tears that now
"Deluge Arezzo at its darling's flight?—
"'Tis unfair, wrongs feminity at large,
"To let a single dame monopolize
"A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike:
"Therefore I overtake you, Canon! Come!
"The lady,—could you leave her side so soon?
"You have not yet experienced at her hands
"My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see!
"Hence this alertness—hence no death-in-life
"Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
"To be sure, you took the solace and repose
"That first night at Foligno!—news abound
"O' the road by this time,—men regaled me much,
"As past them I came halting after you,
"Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing,—
"Still at the last here pant I, but arrive,
"Vulcan—and not without my Cyclops too,
"The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
"O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
"Enough of fooling: capture the culprits, friend!
"Here is the lover in the smart disguise
"With the sword,—he is a priest, so mine lies still.
"There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
"His leman: the two plotted, poisoned first,
"Plundered me after, and eloped thus far
"Where now you find them. Do your duty quick!
"Arrest and hold him! That's done: now catch her!"
During this speech of that man,—well, I stood
Away, as he managed,—still, I stood as near
The throat of him,—with these two hands, my own,—
As now I stand near yours, Sir,—one quick spring,
One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
There had he lain abolished with his lie,
Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
A spittle wiped off from the face of God!
I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse
For what I left undone, in just this fact
That my first feeling at the speech I quote
Was—not of what a blasphemy was dared,
Not what a bag of venomed purulence
Was split and noisome,—but how splendidly
Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched!
Would Molière's self wish more than hear such man
Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife,
Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
He had stammered, she moreover was divine?
She to be his,—were hardly less absurd
Than that he took her name into his mouth,
Licked, and then let it go again, the beast,
Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
Plundered him, and the rest! Well, what I wished
Was, that he would but go on, say once more
So to the world, and get his meed of men,

The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,
The minute, oh the misery, was gone!
On either idle hand of me there stood
Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least:
Nay, rendered justice to his reason, laid
Logic to heart, as 'twere submitted them
"Twice two makes four."
"And now, catch her!" he cried.
That sobered me. "Let myself lead the way—
"Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
"Being, as you hear, a priest and privileged,—
"To the lady's chamber! I presume you—men
"Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
"Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
"Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
"Between us and the mad dog howling there!"
Up we all went together, in they broke
O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay,
Composed as when I laid her, that last eve,
O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
O' the morning that now flooded from the front
And filled the window with a light like blood.
"Behold the poisoner, the adulteress,
"—And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!" Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all a flame with morning-red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy and light and life.
"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:
"Hell for me, no embracing any more!
"I am God's, I love God, God—whose knees I clasp,
"Whose utterly most just award I take,
"But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"
I may have made an effort to reach her side
From where I stood i' the door-way,—anyhow
I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
Was powerless in the clutch to left and right
O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth
Home and the husband,—pay in prospect too!
They heaped themselves upon me. "Ha! —and him
"Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend,
"Guardian and saviour? That I baulk you of,
"Since—see how God can help at last and worst!"
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!"
Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
—The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
Spawned somehow! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.
No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
To spike the coward through and through: he shook,
Could only spit between the teeth—"You see?
"You hear? Bear witness, then! Write down . . but no—
"Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
"For first thing! I begin my search meanwhile
"After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate,
"Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled,
"With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
"I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that—no more than the first mad speech,

Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock,
So neither did this next device explode
One listener's indignation,—that a scribe
Did sit down, set himself to write indeed,
While sundry knaves began to peer and pry
In corner and hole,—that Guido, wiping brow
And getting him a countenance, was fast
Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there,—
Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently
The service for the moment. "What I say,
"Slight at your peril! We are aliens here,
"My adversary and I, called noble both;
"I am the nobler, and a name men know.
"I could refer our cause to our own Court
"In our own country, but prefer appeal
"To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
"Though in a secular garb,—for reasons good
"I shall adduce in due time to my peers,—
"I demand that the Church I serve, decide
"Between us, right the slandered lady there.
"A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
"A priest, I rather choose the Church,—bid Rome
"Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

There was no refusing this: they bore me off,
They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same
Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
The last time in this life: not one sight since,
Never another sight to be! And yet
I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome:
It seems I simply sent her to her death.
You tell me she is dying now, or dead;
I cannot bring myself to quite believe
This is a place you torture people in:
What if this your intelligence were just
A subtlety, an honest wile to work
On a man at unawares? 'Twere worthy you.
No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
That vision in the blood-red day-break—that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find—
Know the manœuvre! Also herself said
I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
Let me see for myself if it be so!
Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
The more when he's a friend too,—she called me
Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her —indeed
It is my duty, being a priest: I hope
I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
My punishment had motive that, a priest
I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode,
Did what were harmlessly done otherwise.
I never touched her with my finger-tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten: that is why
—To get leave and go see her of your grace—
I have told you this whole story over again.
Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you
To do with me in the matter? I suppose
You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress
To have a hand in the new crime; on the old,
Judgment's delivered, penalty imposed,
I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot—
She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest
Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth;
I have been patient, done my best to help:
I come from Civita and punishment
As friend of the Court—and for pure friendship's sake
Have told my tale to the end,—nay, not the end—
For, wait—I'll end—not leave you that excuse!

When we were parted,—shall I go on there?
I was presently brought to Rome—yes, here I stood
Opposite yonder very crucifix—
And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.
I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
Noted down in the book there,—turn and see
If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now!
I' the colour the tale takes, there's change perhaps;
'Tis natural, since the sky is different,
Eclipse in the air now; still, the outline stays.
I showed you how it came to be my part
To save the lady. Then your clerk produced
Papers, a pack of stupid and impure
Banalities called letters about love—
Love, indeed,—I could teach who styled them so,
Better, I think, though priest and loveless both!
"—How was it that a wife, young, innocent,
"And stranger to your person, wrote this page?"—
"—She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote
"The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,
"Put in his mouth by Pasquin."[1] "Nor perhaps
"Did you return these answers, verse and prose,
"Signed, sealed and sent the lady? There's your hand!"
"—This precious piece of verse, I really judge,
"Is meant to copy my own character,
"A clumsy mimic; and this other prose,
"Not so much even; both rank forgery:
"Verse, quotha? Bembo's[2] verse! When Saint John wrote
"The tract '*De Tribus*,'[3] I wrote this to match."
"—How came it, then, the documents were found
"At the inn on your departure?"—"I opine,
"Because there were no documents to find
"In my presence,—you must hide before you find.
"Who forged them hardly practised in my view;
"Who found them waited till I turned my back."
"—And what of the clandestine visits paid,
"Nocturnal passage in and out the house
"With its lord absent? 'Tis alleged you climbed . . ."
"—Flew on a broomstick to the man i' the moon!
"Who witnessed or will testify this trash?"
"—The trusty servant, Margherita's self,
"Even she who brought you letters, you confess,
"And, you confess, took letters in reply:
"Forget not we have knowledge of the facts!"
"—Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray
"The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
"Trying to find out just one fact of all!
"She who brought letters from who could not write,
"And took back letters to who could not read,—
"Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
"—Well, so far favours you the circumstance
"That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . . .
"*Sub imputatione meretricis*
"*Laborat*,[4]—which makes accusation null:
"We waive this woman's: nought makes void the next.
"Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
"O' the first night when you fled away, at length

[1] *Pasquin:* the name given to a statue in Rome (from Pasquino, a cobbler, whose shop opposite to it was a centre of gossip) on which anonymous squibs were posted.

[2] *Bembo:* secretary to Pope Leo X., and a well-known man of letters (1470–1547).

[3] *De Tribus:* the tract "De Tribus Impostoribus" (Moses, Mahomet, and Christ), often referred to in the Middle Ages.

[4] *Sub imputatione meretricis laborat:* "labours under the imputation of unchastity."

"Deposes to your kissings in the coach,
"—Frequent, frenetic . . ." "When deposed he so?"
"After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . ."
"—Granted by friend the Governor, I engage—"
"—For his participation in your flight!
"At length his obduracy melting made
"The avowal mentioned . ." "Was dismissed forthwith
"To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
"Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
"For me, no word in my defence I speak,
"And God shall argue for the lady!"
So
Did I stand question, and make answer, still
With the same result of smiling disbelief,
Polite impossibility of faith
In such affected virtue in a priest;
But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even,
To one no worse than others after all—
Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth
In a bungling game at romps: I have told you, Sirs—
If I pretended simply to be pure
Honest and Christian in the case,—absurd!
As well go boast myself above the needs
O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,
Wine tastes,—a saint above the smack! But once
Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree
To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
Why, hogs in common herd have common rights:
I must not be unduly borne upon,
Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,
But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault.
My name helped to a mirthful circumstance:
"Joseph" would do well to amend his plea:
Undoubtedly—some toying with the wife,
But as for ruffian violence and rape,
Potiphar pressed too much on the other side!
The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise,—well charged!
The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
Your apprehension was—of guilt enough
To be compatible with innocence,
So, punished best a little and not too much.
Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
Baulk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round,
Congratulated, "Nobody mistakes!
"The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines
"The peccadillo: Guido gets his share:
"His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
"The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law.
"To Civita with you and amuse the time,
"Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ!*'
"A funny figure must the husband cut
"When the wife makes him skip,—too ticklish, eh?
"Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then!
"Scazons[1]—we'll copy and send his Eminence.
"Mind—one iambus in the final foot!
"He'll rectify it, be your friend for life!"
Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light
Thrown on the justice and religion here
By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought!

And I was just set down to study these
In relegation, two short days ago,
Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
A thunder comes into my solitude—
I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here,
Told of a sudden, in this room where so late
You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,
I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands,
Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
Full measure, pressed down, running over now!
Can I assist to an explanation?—Yes,
I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
The officious priest would personate Saint George

[1] *Scazons:* iambic verses, with a spondee in the final foot instead of an iambus.

For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
What, the blood startles you? What, after all
The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
And should have been a Saint George also? Then,
There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds
At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand,
Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live?
But you were law and gospel,—would one please
Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room?
You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
What was there here should have perplexed your wit
For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
What's now forced on you by this flare of fact—
As if Saint Peter failed to recognize
Nero as no apostle, John or James,
Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch
O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
Could you fail read this cartulary aright
On head and front of Franceschini there,
Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print,—
That he, from the beginning pricked at heart
By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,
Plotted to plague her into overt sin
And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
And save his mean self—miserably caught
I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?
—That himself wrote those papers,—from himself
To himself,—which, i' the name of me and her,
His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
Touching us with such pustules of the soul
That she and I might take the taint, be shown
To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
—That the agent put her sense into my words,
Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
While the husband in the background bit his lips
At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
—That when at the last we did rush each on each,
By no chance but because God willed it so—
The spark of truth was struck from out our souls—
Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
Seem fair and honest and permissible love
O' the good and true—as the first glance told me
There was no duty patent in the world
Like daring try be good and true myself,
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show
And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
Even to its most ambiguous circumstance,
Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
Why, men—men and not boys—boys and not babes—
Babes and not beasts—beasts and not stocks and stones!—
Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck,
Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place,
Disposer of the time, to come at a call
And go at a wink as who should say me nay,—
What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
But just damnation, failure or success?
Damnation pure and simple to her the wife
And me the priest—who bartered private bliss
For public reprobation, the safe shade
For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by:
What other advantage,—we who led the days
And nights alone i' the house,—was flight to find?
In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
Diverge a foot from straight road till we reached
Or would have reached—but for that fate of ours—
The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
The eye of yourselves we made aware of us
At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed

You did so far give sanction to our flight,
Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand,
Deliver up Pompilia not to him
She fled, but those the flight was ventured for.
Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
One poor step more, and justify the means,
Having allowed the end?—not see and say
"Here's the exceptional conduct that should claim
"To be exceptionally judged on rules
"Which, understood, make no exception here"—
Why play instead into the devil's hands
By dealing so ambiguously as gave
Guido the power to intervene like me,
Prove one exception more? I saved his wife
Against law: against law he slays her now:
Deal with him!

I have done with being judged.
I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
To the point that I apprise you,—in contempt
For all misapprehending ignorance
O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!
"The priest's in love," have it the vulgar way!
Unpriest me, rend the rags o' the vestment, do—
Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare—
Remove me from the midst, no longer priest
And fit companion for the like of you—
Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
Brisk Bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
From the rochet; I'll no more of these good things:
There's a crack somewhere, something that's unsound
I' the rattle!

For Pompilia—be advised,
Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
I know, if you come,—and you will come, I know.
Why, there's a Judge weeping! Did not I say
You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth—
I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.

But for Count Guido,—you must counsel there!
I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
I had him one whole moment, as I said—
As I remember, as will never out
O' the thoughts of me,—I had him in arm's reach
There,—as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit,—
I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
And did not: he went off alive and well
And then effected this last feat—through me!
Me—not through you—dismiss that fear!
'Twas you
Hindered me staying here to save her,—not
From leaving you and going back to him
And doing service in Arezzo. Come,
Instruct me in procedure! I conceive—
In all due self-abasement might I speak—
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
Not death,—your lights will teach you clearer! I
Certainly have an instinct of my own
I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
Let us go away—leave Guido all alone
Back on the world again that knows him now!
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate

Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,
I seem to see him catch convulsively
One by one at all honest forms of life,
At reason, order, decency and use—
To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
And still they disengage them from his clutch.
"What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
"And so forwent her? Take not up with us!"
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
From what just is to absolute nothingness—
Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate,
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
To flatter him and promise fellowship,
Discovers in the act a frightful face—
Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
The two are at one now! Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
Or fondle this the other while malice aches—
Both teach, both learn detestability!
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ—
Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
In their one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more!

Why, Sirs, what's this? Why, this is sorry and strange!
Futility, divagation: this from me
Bound to be rational, justify an act
Of sober man!—whereas, being moved so much,
I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind:
A pretty sarcasm for the world! I fear
You do her wit injustice,—all through me!
Like my fate all through,—ineffective help!
A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
You might be angry with good cause: but sure
At the advocate,—only at the undue zeal
That spoils the force of his own plea, I think?
My part was just to tell you how things stand,
State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
But then 'tis a priest speaks: as for love,—no!
If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong! We had no thought
Of such infatuation, she and I:
There are many points that prove it: do be just!
I told you,—at one little roadside-place
I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
The garden; just to leave her free awhile,
I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom:
I might have sat beside her on the bench
Where the children were: I wish the thing had been,
Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know:
One more half-hour of her saved! She's dead now, Sirs!
While I was running on at such a rate,
Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve: I went
Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
And the purity that shone there—plain to me,
Not to you, what more natural? Nor am I
Infatuated,—oh, I saw, be sure!

Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek:
This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me!
The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.
That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
He sought just to disfigure,—no offence
Beyond that! Sirs, let us be rational!
He needs must vindicate his honour,—ay,
Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
Away from the scene, endeavours to escape.
Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
O' the slayer,—what were vindicated, pray?
You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse,
For what and by whom? It is too palpable!
Then, here's another point involving law:
I use this argument to show you meant
No calumny against us by that title
O' the sentence,—liars try to twist it so:
What penalty it bore, I had to pay
Till further proof should follow of innocence—
Probationis ob defectum,[1]—proof?
How could you get proof without trying us?
You went through the preliminary form,
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase,—as when we say of you
"Charged with injustice"—which may either be
Or not be,—'tis a name that sticks meanwhile.
Another relevant matter: fool that I am!
Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge:
It is not true,—yet, since friends think it helps,—
She only tried me when some others failed—
Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
And when abandoned by them, not before,
Turned to me. That's conclusive why she turned.
Much good they got by the happy cowardice!
Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago:
Does that much strike you as a sin? Not much,
After the present murder,—one mark more
On the Moor's skin,—what is black by blacker still?
Conti had come here and told truth. And so
With Guillichini; he's condemned of course
To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world,
A fortnight since by who but the Governor?—
The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome: he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped,—lays stress on the main fault,
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to: but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog—
That's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor:
If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici!
Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say!
More easily duped, I mean; this stupid lie,
Its liar never dared propound in Rome,
He gets Arezzo to receive,—nay more,
Gets Florence and the Duke to authorize!
This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
Signs and seals! Rome for me henceforward—Rome,
Where better men are,—most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital,
Who writes the letter,—he confessed, he says,

[1] *Probationis ob defectum:* "for want of sufficient proof."

Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man! Will you make him Pope one day?
Not that he is not good too, this we have—
But old,—else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world: I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world—
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!—
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!

VII.—POMPILIA.

[In this Book scarcely any explanatory notes are necessary. With dramatic appropriateness, the speech of Pompilia is expressed in language of exceptional simplicity and directness.]

I AM just seventeen years and five months old,
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
'Tis writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
—Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Pompilia Comparini,—laughable!
Also 'tis writ that I was married there
Four years ago: and they will add, I hope,
When they insert my death, a word or two,—
Omitting all about the mode of death,—
This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
That I had been a mother of a son
Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace
O' the Curate, not through any claim I have;
Because the boy was born at, so baptized
Close to, the Villa, in the proper church:
A pretty church, I say no word against,
Yet stranger-like,—while this Lorenzo seems
My own particular place, I always say.
I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high
As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,
With half his body rushing from the wall,
Eating the figure of a prostrate man—
(To the right, it is, of entry by the door)
An ominous sign to one baptized like me,
Married, and to be buried there, I hope.

And they should add, to have my life complete,
He is a boy and Gaetan by name—
Gaetano, for a reason,—if the friar
Don Celestine will ask this grace for me
Of Curate Ottoboni: he it was
Baptized me: he remembers my whole life
As I do his grey hair.

All these few things
I know are true,—will you remember them?
Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
To count my wounds,—twenty-two dagger-wounds,
Five deadly, but I do not suffer much—
Or too much pain,—and am to die to-night.

Oh how good God is that my babe was born,
—Better than born, baptized and hid away
Before this happened, safe from being hurt!
That had been sin God could not well forgive:
He was too young to smile and save himself.
When they took, two days after he was born,
My babe away from me to be baptized
And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find,—
The country-woman, used to nursing babes,
Said "Why take on so? where is the great loss?
"These next three weeks he will but sleep and feed,
"Only begin to smile at the month's end;
"He would not know you, if you kept him here,
"Sooner than that; so, spend three merry weeks
"Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout,
"And then I bring him back to be your own,
"And both of you may steal to—we know where!"
The month—there wants of it two weeks this day!
Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock
At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she—
Come to say "Since he smiles before the time,
"Why should I cheat you out of one good hour?
"Back I have brought him; speak to him and judge!"
Now I shall never see him; what is worse,
When he grows up and gets to be my age,
He will seem hardly more than a great boy;
And if he asks "What was my mother like?"
People may answer "Like girls of seventeen"—
And how can he but think of this and that,
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
When he regards them as such boys may do?
Therefore I wish someone will please to say
I looked already old though I was young;
Do I not . . . say, if you are by to speak . . .
Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least,
Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,
Than the poor Virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche,—
The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,—
Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more:
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.

How happy those are who know how to write!
Such could write what their son should read in time,
Had they a whole day to live out like me.
Also my name is not a common name,
"Pompilia," and may help to keep apart
A little the thing I am from what girls are.
But then how far away, how hard to find
Will anything about me have become,
Even if the boy bethink himself and ask!
No father that he ever knew at all,
Nor never had—no, never had, I say!
That is the truth,—nor any mother left,
Out of the little two weeks that she lived,
Fit for such memory as might assist:
As good too as no family, no name,
Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
They must not be my parents any more.
That is why something put it in my head

To call the boy "Gaetano"—no old name
For sorrow's sake; I looked up to the sky
And took a new saint[1] to begin anew.
One who has only been made saint—how long?
Twenty-five years: so, carefuller, perhaps,
To guard a namesake than those old saints grow,
Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints!

On second thoughts, I hope he will regard
The history of me as what someone dreamed,
And get to disbelieve it at the last:
Since to myself it dwindles fast to that,
Sheer dreaming and impossibility,—
Just in four days too! All the seventeen years,
Not once did a suspicion visit me
How very different a lot is mine
From any other woman's in the world.
The reason must be, 'twas by step and step
It got to grow so terrible and strange.
These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
Into my neighbourhood and privacy,
Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay;
And I was found familiarised with fear,
When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried
"Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
"How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
"And the soft length,—lies in and out your feet
"And laps you round the knee,—a snake it is!"
And so on.

Well, and they are right enough,
By the torch they hold up now: for first, observe,
I never had a father,—no, nor yet
A mother: my own boy can say at least
"I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!"
Not I, who little used to doubt . . . *I* doubt
Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth?
They loved me always as I love my babe
(—Nearly so, that is—quite so could not be—)
Did for me all I meant to do for him,
Till one surprising day, three years ago,
They both declared, at Rome, before some judge
In some Court where the people flocked to hear,
That really I had never been their child,
Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
Of a woman known too well,—little to these,
Therefore, of whom I was the flesh and blood:
What then to Pietro and Violante, both
No more my relatives than you or you?
Nothing to them! You know what they declared.

So with my husband,—just such a surprise,
Such a mistake, in that relationship!
Everyone says that husbands love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'Tis duty, law, pleasure, religion: well,
You see how much of this comes true in mine!
People indeed would fain have somehow proved
He was no husband: but he did not hear,
Or would not wait, and so has killed us all.
Then there is . . . only let me name one more!
There is the friend,—men will not ask about,
But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
And think my lover, most surprise of all!
Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi: a priest—love,
And love me! Well, yet people think he did.
I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
They know that, and yet go on, say, the same,
"Yes, how he loves you!" "That was love"—they say,
When anything is answered that they ask:
Or else "No wonder you love him"—they say.

[1] *A new saint:* St. Gaetan or Cajetan, founder of the order of Theatins, who lived 1480–1547, and was canonized by Clement X. in 1671.

Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame—
As if we neither of us lacked excuse,
And anyhow are punished to the full,
And downright love atones for everything!
Nay, I heard read out in the public Court
Before the judge, in presence of my friends,
Letters 'twas said the priest had sent to me,
And other letters sent him by myself,
We being lovers!
Listen what this is like!
When I was a mere child, my mother . . . that's
Violante, you must let me call her so
Nor waste time, trying to unlearn the word . . .
She brought a neighbour's child of my own age
To play with me of rainy afternoons;
And, since there hung a tapestry on the wall,
We two agreed to find each other out
Among the figures. "Tisbe, that is you,
"With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
"Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf
"Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back:
"Call off your hound and leave the stag alone!"
"—And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves
"Flourishing out of your five finger-ends,
"And all the rest of you so brown and rough:
"Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?"
You know the figures never were ourselves
Though we nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life,—
As well what was, as what, like this, was not,—
Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
—Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
Something began for once that would not end,
Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
For evermore, eternally quite mine.
Well, so he is,—but yet they bore him off,
The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
And catch him, and by means of him catch me.
Since they have saved him so, it was well done:
Yet thence comes such confusion of what was
With what will be,—that late seems long ago,
And, what years should bring round, already come,
Till even he withdraws into a dream
As the rest do: I fancy him grown great,
Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me,
Frowns with the others "Poor imprudent child!
"Why did you venture out of the safe street?
"Why go so far from help to that lone house?
"Why open at the whisper and the knock?"

Six days ago when it was New Year's-day,
We bent above the fire and talked of him,
What he should do when he was grown and great.
Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
And fireside,—laughed, as I lay safe at last,
"Pompilia's march from bed to board is made,
"Pompilia back again and with a babe,
"Shall one day lend his arm and help her walk!"
Then we all wished each other more New Years.
Pietro began to scheme—"Our cause is gained;
"The law is stronger than a wicked man:
"Let him henceforth go his way, leave us ours!
"We will avoid the city, tempt no more
"The greedy ones by feasting and parade,—
"Live at the other villa, we know where,
"Still farther off, and we can watch the babe
"Grow fast in the good air; and wood is cheap
"And wine sincere outside the city gate.
"I still have two or three old friends will grope
"Their way along the mere half-mile of road,
"With staff and lantern on a moonless night
"When one needs talk: they'll find me, never fear,
"And I'll find them a flask of the old sort yet!"
Violante said "You chatter like a crow:
"Pompilia tires o' the tattle, and shall to bed:

"Do not too much the first day,—somewhat more
"To-morrow, and, the next, begin the cape
"And hood and coat! I have spun wool enough."
Oh what a happy friendly eve was that!

And, next day, about noon, out Pietro went—
He was so happy and would talk so much,
Until Violante pushed and laughed him forth
Sight-seeing in the cold,—"So much to see
"I' the churches! Swathe your throat three times!" she cried,
"And, above all, beware the slippery ways,
"And bring us all the news by supper-time!"
He came back late, laid by cloak, staff and hat,
Powdered so thick with snow it made us laugh,
Rolled a great log upon the ash o' the hearth,
And bade Violante treat us to a flask,
Because he had obeyed her faithfully,
Gone sight-see through the seven, and found no church
To his mind like San Giovanni—"There's the fold,
"And all the sheep together, big as cats!
"And such a shepherd, half the size of life,
"Starts up and hears the angel"—when, at the door,
A tap: we started up: you know the rest.

Pietro at least had done no harm, I know;
Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes
Such revenge lawful. Certainly she erred—
Did wrong, how shall I dare say otherwise?—
In telling that first falsehood, buying me
From my poor faulty mother at a price,
To pass off upon Pietro as his child.
If one should take my babe, give him a name,
Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
But that some other woman made his mouth
And hands and feet,—how very false were that!
No good could come of that; and all harm did.
Yet if a stranger were to represent
"Needs must you either give your babe to me
"And let me call him mine for evermore,
"Or let your husband get him"—ah, my God,
That were a trial I refuse to face!
Well, just so here: it proved wrong but seemed right
To poor Violante—for there lay, she said,
My poor real dying mother in her rags,
Who put me from her with the life and all,
Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
To die the easier by what price I fetched—
Also (I hope) because I should be spared
Sorrow and sin,—why may not that have helped?
My father,—he was no one, any one,—
The worse, the likelier,—call him—he who came,
Was wicked for his pleasure, went his way,
And left no trace to track by; there remained
Nothing but me, the unnecessary life,
To catch up or let fall,—and yet a thing
She could make happy, be made happy with,
This poor Violante, — who would frown thereat?

Well, God, you see! God plants us where we grow.
It is not that because a bud is born
At a wild briar's end, full i' the wild beast's way,
We ought to pluck and put it out of reach
On the oak-tree top,—say "There the bud belongs!"
She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
For harm's sake; whereas this had good at heart,
Good for my mother, good for me, and good
For Pietro who was meant to love a babe,
And needed one to make his life of use,
Receive his house and land when he should die.
Wrong, wrong and always wrong! how plainly wrong!
For see, this fault kept pricking, as faults do,
All the same at her heart: this falsehood hatched,
She could not let it go nor keep it fast.
She told me so,—the first time I was found
Locked in her arms once more after the pain,
When the nuns let me leave them and go home,

And both of us cried all the cares away,—
This it was set her on to make amends,
This brought about the marriage—simply this!
Do let me speak for her you blame so much!
When Paul, my husband's brother, found me out,
Heard there was wealth for who should marry me,
So, came and made a speech to ask my hand
For Guido,—she, instead of piercing straight
Through the pretence to the ignoble truth,
Fancied she saw God's very finger point,
Designate just the time for planting me
(The wild-briar slip she plucked to love and wear)
In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,
And get to be the thing I called myself:
For, wife and husband are one flesh, God says,
And I, whose parents seemed such and were none,
Should in a husband have a husband now,
Find nothing, this time, but was what it seemed,
—All truth and no confusion any more.
I know she meant all good to me, all pain
To herself,—since how could it be aught but pain
To give me up, so, from her very breast,
The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,
She had got used to feel for and find fixed?
She meant well: has it been so ill i' the main?
That is but fair to ask: one cannot judge
Of what has been the ill or well of life,
The day that one is dying,—sorrows change
Into not altogether sorrow-like;
I do see strangeness but scarce misery,
Now it is over, and no danger more.
My child is safe; there seems not so much pain.
It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair,—
One cannot both have and not have, you know,—
Being right now, I am happy and colour things.
Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
Softened and bettered: so with other sights:
To me at least was never evening yet
But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
For past is past.

There was a fancy came,
When somewhere, in the journey with my friend,
We stepped into a hovel to get food;
And there began a yelp here, a bark there,—
Misunderstanding creatures that were wroth
And vexed themselves and us till we retired.
The hovel is life: no matter what dogs bit
Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
All outside is lone field, moon and such peace—
Flowing in, filling up as with a sea
Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,
Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
To meet me and calm all things back again.

Beside, up to my marriage, thirteen years
Were, each day, happy as the day was long:
This may have made the change too terrible.
I know that when Violante told me first
The cavalier—she meant to bring next morn,
Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand—
Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve
And marry me,—which over, we should go
Home both of us without him as before,
And, till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
From whom one word would make a father blush,—
I know, I say, that when she told me this,
—Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
Than a lamb does in people clipping wool;
Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
And when next day the cavalier who came—

(Tisbe had told me that the slim young man
With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
Would eat a girl else,—was a cavalier)
When he proved Guido Franceschini,—old
And nothing like so tall as I myself,
Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
He called an owl and used for catching birds,—
And when he took my hand and made a smile—
Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
Seemed hardly more important in the case
Than,—when one gives you, say, a coin to spend,—
Its newness or its oldness; if the piece
Weigh properly and buy you what you wish,
No matter whether you get grime or glare!
Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
Would purchase me the praise of those I loved:
About what else should I concern myself?

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant,
I supposed this or any man would serve,
No whit the worse for being so uncouth:
For I was ill once and a doctor came
With a great ugly hat, no plume thereto,
Black jerkin and black buckles and black sword,
And white sharp beard over the ruff in front,
And oh so lean, so sour-faced and austere!—
Who felt my pulse, made me put out my tongue,
Then oped a phial, dripped a drop or two
Of a black bitter something,—I was cured!
What mattered the fierce beard or the grim face?
It was the physic beautified the man,
Master Malpichi,—never met his match
In Rome, they said,—so ugly all the same!

However, I was hurried through a storm,
Next dark eve of December's deadest day—
How it rained!—through our street and the Lion's-mouth
And the bit of Corso,—cloaked round, covered close,
I was like something strange or contraband,—
Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,
My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
I fancied we were come to see a corpse
Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
There we found waiting an unpleasant priest
Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,
But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,
Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then
I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
Behind us: for the customary warmth,
Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick—
"Lose no time!" cried the priest. And straightway down
From . . . what's behind the altar where he hid—
Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,
Read here and there, made me say that and this,
And after, told me I was now a wife,
Honoured indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church,
And therefore turned he water into wine,
To show I should obey my spouse like Christ.
Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
And I, silent and scared, got down again
And joined my mother who was weeping now.
Nobody seemed to mind us any more,
And both of us on tiptoe found our way
To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
All things looked better. At our own house-door,
Violante whispered "No one syllable
"To Pietro! Girl-brides never breathe a word!"

"—Well treated to a wetting, draggle-tails!"
Laughed Pietro as he opened—"Very near
"You made me brave the gutter's roaring sea
"To carry off from roost old dove and young,
"Trussed up in church, the cote, by me, the kite!
"What do these priests mean, praying folk to death
"On stormy afternoons, with Christmas close
"To wash our sins off nor require the rain?"
Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze,
Madonna saved me from immodest speech,
I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.

When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,
Of Guido—"Nor the Church sees Christ" thought I:
"Nothing is changed however, wine is wine
"And water only water in our house.
"Nor did I see that ugly doctor since
"That cure of the illness: just as I was cured,
"I am married,—neither scarecrow will return."

Three weeks, I chuckled—"How would Giulia stare,
"And Tecla smile and Tisbe laugh outright,
"Were it not impudent for brides to talk!"—
Until one morning, as I sat and sang
At the broidery-frame alone i' the chamber,—loud
Voices, two, three together, sobbings too,
And my name, "Guido," "Paolo," flung like stones
From each to the other! In I ran to see.
There stood the very Guido and the priest
With sly face,—formal but nowise afraid,—
While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce
Able to stutter out his wrath in words;
And this it was that made my mother sob,
As he reproached her—"You have murdered us,
"Me and yourself and this our child beside!"
Then Guido interposed "Murdered or not,
"Be it enough your child is now my wife!
"I claim and come to take her." Paul put in,
"Consider—kinsman, dare I term you so?—
"What is the good of your sagacity
"Except to counsel in a strait like this?
"I guarantee the parties man and wife
"Whether you like or loathe it, bless or ban.
"May spilt milk be put back within the bowl—
"The done thing, undone? You, it is, we look
"For counsel to, you fitliest will advise!
"Since milk, though spilt and spoilt, does marble good,
"Better we down on knees and scrub the floor,
"Than sigh, 'the waste would make a syllabub!'
"Help us so turn disaster to account,
"So predispose the groom, he needs shall grace
"The bride with favour from the very first,
"Not begin marriage an embittered man!"
He smiled,—the game so wholly in his hands!
While fast and faster sobbed Violante—"Ay,
"All of us murdered, past averting now!
"O my sin, O my secret!" and such like.

Then I began to half surmise the truth;
Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
False, and my mother was to blame, and I
To pity, whom all spoke of, none addressed:
I was the chattel that had caused a crime.
I stood mute,—those who tangled must untie
The embroilment. Pietro cried "Withdraw, my child!
"She is not helpful to the sacrifice
"At this stage,—do you want the victim by
"While you discuss the value of her blood?
"For her sake, I consent to hear you talk:
"Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!"

I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough,

But movement on her mouth for make-believe
Matters were somehow getting right again.
She bade me sit down by her side and hear.
"You are too young and cannot understand,
"Nor did your father understand at first.
"I wished to benefit all three of us,
"And when he failed to take my meaning,—why,
"I tried to have my way at unaware—
"Obtained him the advantage he refused.
"As if I put before him wholesome food
"Instead of broken victual,—he finds change
"I' the viands, never cares to reason why,
"But falls to blaming me, would fling the plate
"From window, scandalize the neighbourhood,
"Even while he smacks his lips,—men's way, my child!
"But either you have prayed him unperverse
"Or I have talked him back into his wits:
"And Paolo was a help in time of need,—
"Guido, not much—my child, the way of men!
"A priest is more a woman than a man,
"And Paul did wonders to persuade. In short,
"Yes, he was wrong, your father sees and says;
"My scheme was worth attempting: and bears fruit,
"Gives you a husband and a noble name,
"A palace and no end of pleasant things.
"What do you care about a handsome youth?
"They are so volatile, and tease their wives!
"This is the kind of man to keep the house.
"We lose no daughter,—gain a son, that's all:
"For 'tis arranged we never separate,
"Nor miss, in our grey time of life, the tints
"Of you that colour eve to match with morn.
"In good or ill, we share and share alike,
"And cast our lots into a common lap,
"And all three die together as we lived!
"Only, at Arezzo,—that's a Tuscan town,
"Not so large as this noisy Rome, no doubt,
"But older far and finer much, say folk,—
"In a great palace where you will be queen,
"Know the Archbishop and the Governor,
"And we see homage done you ere we die.
"Therefore, be good and pardon!"—"Pardon what?
"You know things, I am very ignorant:
"All is right if you only will not cry!"

And so an end! Because a blank begins
From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and hot,
And took me back to where my father leaned
Opposite Guido—who stood eyeing him,
As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more,—
While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at whiles
With the pen-point as to punish triumph there,—
And said "Count Guido, take your lawful wife
"Until death part you!"

All since is one blank,
Over and ended; a terrific dream.
It is the good of dreams—so soon they go!
Wake in a horror of heart-beats, you may—
Cry "The dread thing will never from my thoughts!"
Still, a few daylight doses of plain life,
Cock-crow and sparrow-chirp, or bleat and bell
Of goats that trot by, tinkling, to be milked;
And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! So here.
I know I wake,—but from what? Blank, I say!
This is the note of evil: for good lasts.
Even when Don Celestine bade "Search and find!
"For your soul's sake, remember what is past,
"The better to forgive it,"—all in vain!
What was fast getting indistinct before,
Vanished outright. By special grace perhaps,
Between that first calm and this last, four years

Vanish,—one quarter of my life, you know.
I am held up, amid the nothingness,
By one or two truths only—thence I hang,
And there I live,—the rest is death or dream,
All but those points of my support. I think
Of what I saw at Rome once in the Square
O' the Spaniards, opposite the Spanish House:
There was a foreigner had trained a goat,
A shuddering white woman of a beast,
To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks
Put close, which gave the creature room enough:
When she was settled there he, one by one,
Took away all the sticks, left just the four
Whereon the little hoofs did really rest,
There she kept firm, all underneath was air.
So, what I hold by, are my prayer to God,
My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,
Some hand would interpose and save me—hand
Which proved to be my friend's hand: and,—blest bliss,—
That fancy which began so faint at first,
That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,
Which I perceive was promise of my child,
The light his unborn face sent long before,—
God's way of breaking the good news to flesh.
That is all left now of those four bad years.
Don Celestine urged "But remember more!
"Other men's faults may help me find your own.
"I need the cruelty exposed, explained,
"Or how can I advise you to forgive?"
He thought I could not properly forgive
Unless I ceased forgetting,—which is true:
For, bringing back reluctantly to mind
My husband's treatment of me,—by a light
That's later than my life-time, I review
And comprehend much and imagine more,
And have but little to forgive at last.
For now,—be fair and say,—is it not true
He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
To get enriched by marriage? Marriage gave
Me and no money, broke the compact so:
He had a right to ask me on those terms,
As Pietro and Violante to declare
They would not give me: so the bargain stood:
They broke it, and he felt himself aggrieved,
Became unkind with me to punish them.
They said 'twas he began deception first,
Nor, in one point whereto he pledged himself,
Kept promise: what of that, suppose it were?
Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate
For ever,—why should ill keep echoing ill,
And never let our ears have done with noise?
Then my poor parents took the violent way
To thwart him,—he must needs retaliate,—wrong,
Wrong, and all wrong,—better say, all blind!
As I myself was, that is sure, who else
Had understood the mystery: for his wife
Was bound in some sort to help somehow there.
It seems as if I might have interposed,
Blunted the edge of their resentment so,
Since he vexed me because they first vexed him;
"I will entreat them to desist, submit,
"Give him the money and be poor in peace,—
"Certainly not go tell the world: perhaps
"He will grow quiet with his gains."

Yes, say
Something to this effect and you do well!
But then you have to see first: I was blind.
That is the fruit of all such wormy ways,
The indirect, the unapproved of God:
You cannot find their author's end and aim,
Not even to substitute your good for bad,
Your straight for the irregular; you stand
Stupefied, profitless, as cow or sheep
That miss a man's mind, anger him just twice
By trial at repairing the first fault.
Thus, when he blamed me, "You are a coquette,
"A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
"You look love-lures at theatre and church,
"In walk, at window!"—that, I knew, was false:

But why he charged me falsely, whither sought
To drive me by such charge,—how could I know?
So, unaware, I only made things worse.
I tried to soothe him by abjuring walk,
Window, church, theatre, for good and all,
As if he had been in earnest: that, you know,
Was nothing like the object of his charge.
Yes, when I got my maid to supplicate
The priest, whose name she read when she would read
Those feigned false letters I was forced to hear
Though I could read no word of,—he should cease
Writing,—nay, if he minded prayer of mine,
Cease from so much as even pass the street
Whereon our house looked,—in my ignorance
I was just thwarting Guido's true intent;
Which was, to bring about a wicked change
Of sport to earnest, tempt a thoughtless man
To write indeed, and pass the house, and more,
Till both of us were taken in a crime.
He ought not to have wished me thus act lies,
Simulate folly: but,—wrong or right, the wish,—
I failed to apprehend its drift. How plain
It follows,—if I fell into such fault,
He also may have overreached the mark,
Made mistake, by perversity of brain,
I' the whole sad strange plot, the grotesque intrigue
To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
Be other man and woman than we were!
Think it out, you who have the time! for me,—
I cannot say less; more I will not say.
Leave it to God to cover and undo!
Only, my dulness should not prove too much!
—Not prove that in a certain other point
Wherein my husband blamed me,—and you blame,
If I interpret smiles and shakes of head,—
I was dull too. Oh, if I dared but speak!
Must I speak? I am blamed that I forwent
A way to make my husband's favour come.
That is true: I was firm, withstood, refused . . .
—Women as you are, how can I find the words?

I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed
I had no right to give nor he to take;
We being in estrangement, soul from soul:
Till, when I sought help, the Archbishop smiled,
Inquiring into privacies of life,
—Said I was blameable—(he stands for God)
Nowise entitled to exemption there.
Then I obeyed,—as surely had obeyed
Were the injunction "Since your husband bids,
"Swallow the burning coal he proffers you!"
But I did wrong, and he gave wrong advice
Though he were thrice Archbishop,—that, I know!—
Now I have got to die and see things clear.
Remember I was barely twelve years old—
A child at marriage: I was let alone
For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
First . . . but I need not think of that again—
Over and ended! Try and take the sense
Of what I signify, if it must be so.
After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,
Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
"We have been man and wife six months almost:
"How long is this your comedy to last?
"Go this night to my chamber, not your own!"
At which word, I did rush—most true the charge—
And gain the Archbishop's house—he stands for God—
And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
Praying him hinder what my estranged soul
Refused to bear, though patient of the rest:
"Place me within a convent," I implored—
"Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
"You praise in Her you bid me imitate!"
What did he answer? "Folly of ignorance!

"Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar
"Virginity,—'tis virtue or 'tis vice.
"That which was glory in the Mother of God
"Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve
"Created to be mother of mankind.
"Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech
"'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth'—
"Pouted 'But I choose rather to remain
"'Single'—why, she had spared herself forthwith
"Further probation by the apple and snake,
"Been pushed straight out of Paradise! For see—
"If motherhood be qualified impure,
"I catch you making God command Eve sin!
"—A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
"I must suspect you dip into their books."
Then he pursued "'Twas in your covenant!"

No! There my husband never used deceit.
He never did by speech nor act imply
"Because of our souls' yearning that we meet
"And mix in soul through flesh, which yours and mine
"Wear and impress, and make their visible selves,
"—All which means, for the love of you and me,
"Let us become one flesh, being one soul!"
He only stipulated for the wealth;
Honest so far. But when he spoke as plain—
Dreadfully honest also—"Since our souls
"Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
"Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
"And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!"—
Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake
Imperilled by polluting mine,—I say,
I did resist; would I had overcome!

My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
—It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
As though 'twere nature frowning—"Here is Spring,
"The sun shines as he shone at Adam's fall,
"The earth requires that warmth reach everywhere:
"What, must your patch of snow be saved forsooth
"Because you rather fancy snow than flowers?"
Something in this style he began with me.
Last he said, savagely for a good man,
"This explains why you call your husband harsh,
"Harsh to you, harsh to whom you love. God's Bread!
"The poor Count has to manage a mere child
"Whose parents leave untaught the simplest things
"Their duty was and privilege to teach,—
"Goodwives' instruction, gossips' lore: they laugh
"And leave the Count the task,—or leave it me!"
Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.
"I am not ignorant,—know what I say,
"Declaring this is sought for hate, not love.
"Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.
"I tell you that my housemate, yes—the priest
"My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo—
"Has taught me what depraved and misnamed love
"Means, and what outward signs denote the sin,
"For he solicits me and says he loves,
"The idle young priest with nought else to do.
"My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.
"Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"
"—More scandal, and against a priest this time!
"What, 'tis the Canon now?"—less snappishly—
"Rise up, my child, for such a child you are,
"The rod were too advanced a punishment!
"Let's try the honeyed cake. A parable!
"'Without a parable spake He not to them.'
"There was a ripe round long black toothsome fruit,
"Even a flower-fig, the prime boast of May:

"And, to the tree, said . . . either the spirit o' the fig,
"Or, if we bring in men, the gardener,
"Archbishop of the orchard—had I time
"To try o' the two which fits in best: indeed
"It might be the Creator's self, but then
"The tree should bear an apple, I suppose,—
"Well, anyhow, one with authority said
"'Ripe fig, burst skin, regale the fig-pecker—
"'The bird whereof thou art a perquisite!'
"'Nay,' with a flounce, replied the restif fig,
"'I much prefer to keep my pulp myself:
"'He may go breakfastless and dinnerless,
"'Supperless of one crimson seed, for me!'
"So, back she flopped into her bunch of leaves.
"He flew off, left her,—did the natural lord,—
"And lo, three hundred thousand bees and wasps
"Found her out, feasted on her to the shuck:
"Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite!
"The moral,—fools elude their proper lot,
"Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
"Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!
"Which if his Canon brother chance to see,
"He will the sooner back to book again."

So, home I did go; so, the worst befell:
So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
And hardly that, and certainly no more.
For, miserable consequence to me,
My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all,
His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
And my last stay and comfort in myself
Was forced from me: henceforth I looked to God
Only, nor cared my desecrated soul
Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world.
God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
Was witness why all lights were quenched inside:
Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind.
So, when I made the effort, freed myself,
They said—"No care to save appearance here!
"How cynic,—when, how wanton, were enough!"
—Adding, it all came of my mother's life—
My own real mother, whom I never knew,
Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
Through being all her life, not my four years,
At mercy of the hateful: every beast
O' the field was wont to break that fountain-fence,
Trample the silver into mud so murk
Heaven could not find itself reflected there.
Now they cry "Out on her, who, plashy pool,
"Bequeathed turbidity and bitterness
"To the daughter-stream where Guido dipt and drank!"

Well, since she had to bear this brand—let me!
The rather do I understand her now,
From my experience of what hate calls love,—
Much love might be in what their love called hate.
If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her child—
I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
That I at least might try be good and pure,
Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?
Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?
Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm,
May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
Have meant to do most good—and feed your child
From bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree
But drew bough back from, nor let one fruit fall?
This it was for you sacrificed your babe?

Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
As I might give mine, loving it as you,
If . . . but that never could be asked of me!

There, enough! I have my support again,
Again the knowledge that my babe was, is,
Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
Outright to God, without a further care,—
But not to any parent in the world,—
So to be safe: why is it we repine?
What guardianship were safer could we choose?
All human plans and projects come to nought:
My life, and what I know of other lives,
Prove that: no plan nor project! God shall care!

And now you are not tired? How patient then
All of you,—Oh yes, patient this long while
Listening, and understanding, I am sure!
Four days ago, when I was sound and well
And like to live, no one would understand.
People were kind, but smiled "And what of him,
"Your friend, whose tonsure the rich dark-brown hides?
"There, there!—your lover, do we dream he was?
"A priest too—never were such naughtiness!
"Still, he thinks many a long think, never fear,
"After the shy pale lady,—lay so light
"For a moment in his arms, the lucky one!"
And so on: wherefore should I blame you much?
So we are made, such difference in minds,
Such difference too in eyes that see the minds!
That man, you misinterpret and misprise—
The glory of his nature, I had thought,
Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
Through every atom of his act with me:
Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,
Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
You all descry a spider in the midst.
One says "The head of it is plain to see,"
And one, "They are the feet by which I judge,"
All say, "Those films were spun by nothing else."

Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
Nor think of him again, for gratitude.
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
About a lustrous and pellucid soul:
So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
And people need assurance in their doubt
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
The weak a saviour and the vile a foe,—
Let him be present, by the name invoked,
Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!

There,
Strength comes already with the utterance!
I will remember once more for his sake
The sorrow: for he lives and is belied.
Could he be here, how he would speak for me!

I had been miserable three drear years
In that dread palace and lay passive now,
When I first learned there could be such a man.
Thus it fell: I was at a public play,
In the last days of Carnival last March,
Brought there I knew not why, but now know well.
My husband put me where I sat, in front;
Then crouched down, breathed cold through me from behind,
Stationed i' the shadow,—none in front could see,—
I, it was, faced the stranger-throng beneath,
The crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare,
Voices one buzz. I looked but to the stage,
Whereon two lovers sang and interchanged
"True life is only love, love only bliss:
"I love thee—thee I love!" then they embraced.
I looked thence to the ceiling and the walls,—
Over the crowd, those voices and those eyes,—

My thoughts went through the roof and out, to Rome
On wings of music, waft of measured words,—
Set me down there, a happy child again
Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day,
Hearing my parents praise past festas more,
And seeing they were old if I was young,
Yet wondering why they still would end discourse
With "We must soon go, you abide your time,
"And,—might we haply see the proper friend
"Throw his arm over you and make you safe!"

Sudden I saw him; into my lap there fell
A foolish twist of comfits, broke my dream
And brought me from the air and laid me low,
As ruined as the soaring bee that's reached
(So Pietro told me at the Villa once)
By the dust-handful. There the comfits lay:
I looked to see who flung them, and I faced
This Caponsacchi, looking up in turn.
Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure,
Whoever flung them, his was not the hand,—
Up rose the round face and good-natured grin
Of one who, in effect, had played the prank,
From covert close beside the earnest face,—
Fat waggish Conti, friend of all the world.
He was my husband's cousin, privileged
To throw the thing: the other, silent, grave,
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.

There is a psalm Don Celestine recites,
"Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!"
The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings,"—
Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast,"—
Simply "How good it were to fly and rest,
"Have hope now, and one day expect content!
"How well to do what I shall never do!"
So I said "Had there been a man like that,
"To lift me with his strength out of all strife
"Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!
"I have a keeper in the garden here
"Whose sole employment is to strike me low
"If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.
"Life means with me successful feigning death,
"Lying stone-like, eluding notice so,
"Forgoing here the turf and there the sky.
"Suppose that man had been instead of this!"

Presently Conti laughed into my ear,
—Had tripped up to the raised place where I sat—
"Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard!
"Because you must be hurt, to look austere
"As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend
"A-gazing now. Ah, Guido, you so close?
"Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
"My cornet[1] battered like a cannon-ball.
"Good-bye, I'm gone!"—nor waited the reply.

That night at supper, out my husband broke,
"Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?
"Do you think I am your dupe? What man would dare
"Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap?
"'Twas knowledge of you bred such insolence
"In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt,
"Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.
"How could you see him this once and no more,
"When he is always haunting hereabout
"At the street-corner or the palace-side,
"Publishing my shame and your impudence?
"You are a wanton,—I a dupe, you think?
"O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?"
Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust.

All this, now,—being not so strange to me,
Used to such misconception day by day
And broken-in to bear,—I bore, this time,

[1] *Cornet:* a piece of paper twisted into a conical shape (such as is commonly used by grocers).

More quietly than woman should perhaps;
Repeated the mere truth and held my tongue.

Then he said, "Since you play the ignorant,
"I shall instruct you. This amour,—commenced
"Or finished or midway in act, all's one,—
"'Tis the town-talk; so my revenge shall be.
"Does he presume because he is a priest?
"I warn him that the sword I wear shall pink
"His lily-scented cassock through and through,
"Next time I catch him underneath your eaves!"
But he had threatened with the sword so oft
And, after all, not kept his promise. All
I said was "Let God save the innocent!
"Moreover death is far from a bad fate.
"I shall go pray for you and me, not him;
"And then I look to sleep, come death or, worse,
"Life." So, I slept.

There may have elapsed a week,
When Margherita,—called my waiting-maid,
Whom it is said my husband found too fair—
Who stood and heard the charge and the reply,
Who never once would let the matter rest
From that night forward, but rang changes still
On this the thrust and that the shame, and how
Good cause for jealousy cures jealous fools,
And what a paragon was this same priest
She talked about until I stopped my ears,—
She said, "A week is gone; you comb your hair,
"Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm,
"Till night comes round again,—so, waste a week
"As if your husband menaced you in sport.
"Have not I some acquaintance with his tricks?
"Oh no, he did not stab the serving-man
"Who made and sang the rhymes about me once!

"For why? They sent him to the wars next day.
"Nor poisoned he the foreigner, my friend
"Who wagered on the whiteness of my breast,—
"The swarth skins of our city in dispute:
"For, though he paid me proper compliment,
"The Count well knew he was besotted with
"Somebody else, a skin as black as ink,
"(As all the town knew save my foreigner)
"He found and wedded presently,—'Why need
"'Better revenge?'—the Count asked. But what's here?
"A priest that does not fight, and cannot wed,
"Yet must be dealt with! If the Count took fire
"For the poor pastime of a minute,—me—
"What were the conflagration for yourself,
"Countess and lady-wife and all the rest?
"The priest will perish; you will grieve too late:
"So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
"Frankest and liberalest gentleman
"Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
"Hanging's too good for. Is there no escape?
"Were it not simple Christian charity
"To warn the priest be on his guard,—save him
"Assured death, save yourself from causing it?
"I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
"A ring to show for token! Mum's the word!"

I answered "If you were, as styled, my maid,
"I would command you: as you are, you say,
"My husband's intimate,—assist his wife
"Who can do nothing but entreat 'Be still!'
"Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
"Leave help to God as I am forced to do!
"There is no other help, or we should craze,
"Seeing such evil with no human cure.
"Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,

"Can make an angry violent heart subside.
"Why should we venture teach Him governance?
"Never address me on this subject more!"

Next night she said "But I went, all the same,
"—Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house,
"And come back stuffed with news I must outpour.
"I told him 'Sir, my mistress is a stone:
"'Why should you harm her for no good you get?
"'For you do harm her—prowl about our place
"'With the Count never distant half the street,
"'Lurking at every corner, would you look!
"''Tis certain she has witched you with a spell.
"'Are there not other beauties at your beck?
"'We all know, Donna This and Monna That
"'Die for a glance of yours, yet here you gaze!
"'Go make them grateful, leave the stone its cold!'
"And he—oh, he turned first white and then red,
"And then—'To her behest I bow myself,
"'Whom I love with my body and my soul:
"'Only a word i' the bowing! See, I write
"'One little word, no harm to see or hear!
"'Then, fear no further!' This is what he wrote.
"I know you cannot read,—therefore, let me!
"'*My idol!*'" . . .

But I took it from her hand
And tore it into shreds. "Why join the rest
"Who harm me? Have I ever done you wrong?
"People have told me 'tis you wrong myself:
"Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
"Or else forgive it,—yet you turn my foe!
"The others hunt me and you throw a noose!"
She muttered "Have your wilful way!" I slept.

Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out!
It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.
Let it suffice, when misery was most,
One day, I swooned and got a respite so.
She stooped as I was slowly coming to,
This Margherita, ever on my trace,
And whispered—"Caponsacchi!"

If I drowned,
But woke afloat i' the wave with upturned eyes,
And found their first sight was a star! I turned—
For the first time, I let her have her will,
Heard passively,—"The imposthume at such head,
"One touch, one lancet-puncture would relieve,—
"And still no glance the good physician's way
"Who rids you of the torment in a trice!
"Still he writes letters you refuse to hear.
"He may prevent your husband, kill himself,
"So desperate and all fordone is he!
"Just hear the pretty verse he made to-day!
"A sonnet from Mirtillo. '*Peerless fair* . . .'
"All poetry is difficult to read,
"—The sense of it is, anyhow, he seeks
"Leave to contrive you an escape from hell,
"And for that purpose asks an interview.
"I can write, I can grant it in your name,
"Or, what is better, lead you to his house.
"Your husband dashes you against the stones;
"This man would place each fragment in a shrine:
"You hate him, love your husband!"

I returned
"It is not true I love my husband,—no,
"Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak,
"—Assured that what you say is false, the same:
"Much as when once, to me a little child,

"A rough gaunt man in rags, with eyes on fire,
"A crowd of boys and idlers at his heels,
"Rushed as I crossed the Square, and held my head
"In his two hands, 'Here's she will let me speak!
"'You little girl, whose eyes do good to mine,
"'I am the Pope, am Sextus, now the Sixth;
"'And that Twelfth Innocent, proclaimed to-day,
"'Is Lucifer disguised in human flesh!
"'The angels, met in conclave, crowned me!'—thus
"He gibbered and I listened; but I knew
"All was delusion, ere folk interposed
"'Unfasten him, the maniac!' Thus I know
"All your report of Caponsacchi false,
"Folly or dreaming; I have seen so much
"By that adventure at the spectacle,
"The face I fronted that one first, last time:
"He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
"Therefore while you profess to show him me,
"I ever see his own face. Get you gone!"

"—That will I, nor once open mouth again,—
"No, by Saint Joseph and the Holy Ghost!
"On your head be the damage, so adieu!"

And so more days, more deeds I must forget,
Till . . . what a strange thing now is to declare!
Since I say anything, say all if true!
And how my life seems lengthened as to serve!
It may be idle or inopportune,
But, true?—why, what was all I said but truth,
Even when I found that such as are untrue
Could only take the truth in through a lie?
Now—I am speaking truth to the Truth's self:
God will lend credit to my words this time.

It had got half through April. I arose
One vivid daybreak,—who had gone to bed
In the old way my wont those last three years,
Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.
The last sound in my ear, the over-night,
Had been a something let drop on the sly
In prattle by Margherita, "Soon enough
"Gaieties end, now Easter's past: a week,
"And the Archbishop gets him back to Rome,—
"Everyone leaves the town for Rome, this Spring,—
"Even Caponsacchi, out of heart and hope,
"Resigns himself and follows with the flock."
I heard this drop and drop like rain outside
Fast-falling through the darkness while she spoke:
So had I heard with like indifference,
"And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first
"At Rome, to introduce the company,
"And bear him from our picture where he fights
"Satan,—expect to have that dragon loose
"And never a defender!"—my sole thought
Being still, as night came, "Done, another day!
"How good to sleep and so get nearer death!"—
When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
Mocking the flies that crossed them and re-crossed
In rival dance, companions new-born too.
On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed
Shook diamonds on each dull grey lattice-square,
As first one, then another bird leapt by,
And light was off, and lo was back again,
Always with one voice,—where are two such joys?—
The blessed building-sparrow! I stepped forth,
Stood on the terrace,—o'er the roofs such sky!

My heart sang, "I too am to go away,
"I too have something I must care about,
"Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!
"The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool,
"And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks rank,
"Falls out of the procession that befits,
"From window here to window there, with all
"The world to choose,—so well he knows his course?
"I have my purpose and my motive too,
"My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!
"Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
"Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
"Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
"Or the poison,—poison, sword, was but a trick,
"Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest!
"My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
"Yesterday, but for the sin,—ah, nameless be
"The deed I could have dared against myself!
"Now—see if I will touch an unripe fruit,
"And risk the health I want to have and use!
"Not to live, now, would be the wickedness,—
"For life means to make haste and go to Rome
"And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!"

Now, understand here, by no means mistake!
Long ago had I tried to leave that house
When it seemed such procedure would stop sin;
And still failed more the more I tried—at first
The Archbishop, as I told you,—next, our lord
The Governor,—indeed I found my way,
I went to the great palace where he rules,
Though I knew well 'twas he who,—when I gave
A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
Back to my parents,—since they wanted bread,
They who had never let me want a nosegay,—he
Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept
What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs,
Though all the while my husband's most of all!
I knew well who had spoke the word wrought this:
Yet, being in extremity, I fled
To the Governor, as I say,—scarce opened lip
When—the cold cruel snicker close behind—
Guido was on my trace, already there,
Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
And I—pushed back to him and, for my pains
Paid with . . . but why remember what is past?
I sought out a poor friar the people call
The Roman, and confessed my sin which came
Of their sin,—that fact could not be repressed,—
The frightfulness of my despair in God:
And, feeling, through the grate, his horror shake,
Implored him, "Write for me who cannot write,
"Apprise my parents, make them rescue me!
"You bid me be courageous and trust God:
"Do you in turn dare somewhat, trust and write
"'Dear friends, who used to be my parents once,
"'And now declare you have no part in me,
"'This is some riddle I want wit to solve,
"'Since you must love me with no difference.
"'Even suppose you altered,—there's your hate,
"'To ask for: hate of you two dearest ones
"'I shall find liker love than love found here,
"'If husbands love their wives. Take me away
"'And hate me as you do the gnats and fleas,
"'Even the scorpions! How I shall rejoice!'
"Write that and save me!" And he promised—wrote

Or did not write; things never changed at all:
He was not like the Augustinian here!
Last, in a desperation I appealed
To friends, whoever wished me better days,
To Guillichini, that's of kin,—"What, I—
"Travel to Rome with you? A flying gout
"Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg!"
Then I tried Conti, used to brave—laugh back
The louring thunder when his cousin scowled
At me protected by his presence: "You—
"Who well know what you cannot save me from,—
"Carry me off! What frightens you, a priest?"
He shook his head, looked grave—"Above my strength!
"Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth;
"A formidabler foe than I dare fret:
"Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size!
"Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
"But . . by the bye . . though both, not quite so bold
"As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest,
"The personage in such ill odour here
"Because of the reports—pure birth o' the brain!
"Our Caponsacchi, he's your true Saint George
"To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
"And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
"I always think so when I see that piece
"I' the Pieve, that's his church and mine, you know:
"Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!"

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense,
Like any by-word, broken bit of song
Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and mouth
That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
And perhaps shame.

—All this intends to say,
That, over-night, the notion of escape
Had seemed distemper, dreaming; and the name,—
Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
Into a mockery and disgrace,—why, she
Who uttered it persistently, had laughed,
"I name his name, and there you start and wince
"As criminal from the red tongs' touch!"—yet now,
Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
Choosing which butterfly should bear my news,—
The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue,—
The Margherita, I detested so,
In she came—"The fine day, the good Spring time!
"What, up and out at window? That is best.
"No thought of Caponsacchi?—who stood there
"All night on one leg, like the sentry crane,
"Under the pelting of your water-spout—
"Looked last look at your lattice ere he leave
"Our city, bury his dead hope at Rome.
"Ay, go to looking-glass and make you fine,
"While he may die ere touch one least loose hair
"You drag at with the comb in such a rage!"

I turned—"Tell Caponsacchi he may come!"

"Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
"A truce to fooling! Come? What,—come this eve?
"Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
"Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
"Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere truth?"

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade
O' the face of her,—the doubt that first paled joy,
Then, final reassurance I indeed
Was caught now, never to be free again!

What did I care?—who felt myself of force
To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springe.

"But—do you know that I have bade him come,
"And in your own name? I presumed so much,
"Knowing the thing you needed in your heart.
"But somehow—what had I to show in proof?
"He would not come: half-promised, that was all,
"And wrote the letters you refused to read.
"What is the message that shall move him now?"

"After the Ave Maria, at first dark,
"I will be standing on the terrace, say!"

"I would I had a good long lock of hair
"Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!"

Off she went—"May he not refuse, that's all—
"Fearing a trick!"

I answered, "He will come."
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent,
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.
An old rhyme came into my head and rang
Of how a virgin, for the faith of God,
Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
In a cave's heart; until a thunderstone,
Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey
And they laughed—"Thanks to lightning, ours at last!"
And she cried "Wrath of God, assert His love!
"Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!"

And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
So did the souls within them die away,
As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!

And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
Whereby I guessed there would be born a star,
Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last
Where the deliverer waited me: the same
Silent and solemn face, I first descried
At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.

So was that minute twice vouchsafed me, so
The manhood, wasted then, was still at watch
To save me yet a second time: no change
Here, though all else changed in the changing world!

I spoke on the instant, as my duty bade,
In some such sense as this, whatever the phrase.

"Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me;
"Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind,
"Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear:
"These to the witless seem the wind itself,
"Since proving thus the first of it they feel.
"If by mischance you blew offence my way,
"The straws are dropt, the wind desists no whit,
"And how such strays were caught up in the street
"And took a motion from you, why inquire?
"I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.
"If it be truth,—why should I doubt it truth?—

"You serve God specially, as priests are bound,
"And care about me, stranger as I am,
"So far as wish my good,—that miracle
"I take to intimate He wills you serve
"By saving me,—what else can He direct?
"Here is the service. Since a long while now,
"I am in course of being put to death:
"While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
"The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
"Now I imperil something more, it seems,
"Something that's truelier me than this myself,
"Something I trust in God and you to save.
"You go to Rome, they tell me: take me there,
"Put me back with my people!"

He replied—
The first word I heard ever from his lips,
All himself in it,—an eternity
Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth
O' the soul that then broke silence—"I am yours."

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,
Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still
Above the House o' the Babe,—my babe to be,
That knew me first and thus made me know him,
That had his right of life and claim on mine,
And would not let me die till he was born,
But pricked me at the heart to save us both,
Saying "Have you the will? Leave God the way!"
And the way was Caponsacchi—"mine," thank God!
He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine.

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know,
Next night there was a cloud came, and not he:
But I prayed through the darkness till it broke
And let him shine. The second night, he came.

"The plan is rash; the project desperate:
"In such a flight needs must I risk your life,
"Give food for falsehood, folly or mistake,
"Ground for your husband's rancour and revenge"—
So he began again, with the same face.
I felt that, the same loyalty—one star
Turning now red that was so white before—
One service apprehended newly: just
A word of mine and there the white was back!

"No, friend, for you will take me! 'Tis yourself
"Risk all, not I,—who let you, for I trust
"In the compensating great God: enough!
"I know you: when is it that you will come?"

"To-morrow at the day's dawn." Then I heard
What I should do: how to prepare for flight
And where to fly.

That night my husband bade
"—You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep
"This whole night! Couch beside me like the corpse
"I would you were!" The rest you know, I think—
How I found Caponsacchi and escaped.

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!
Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st once,
"He hath a devil"—say he was Thy saint,
My Caponsacchi! Shield and show—unshroud
In Thine own time the glory of the soul
If aught obscure,—if ink-spot, from vile pens
Scribbling a charge against him—(I was glad
Then, for the first time, that I could not write)—
Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze!

For me,
'Tis otherwise: let men take, sift my thoughts
—Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach!
I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,
"Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!"
Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
Holding my hand across the world,—a sense
That reads, as only such can read, the mark
God sets on woman, signifying so
She should—shall peradventure—be divine;
Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
—Not this man sees,—who from his soul, re-writes
The obliterated charter,—love and strength
Mending what's marred. "So kneels a votarist,
"Weeds some poor waste traditionary plot
"Where shrine once was, where temple yet may be,
"Purging the place but worshipping the while,
"By faith and not by sight, sight clearest so,—
"Such way the saints work,"—says Don Celestine.
But I, not privileged to see a saint
Of old when such walked earth with crown and palm,
If I call "saint" what saints call something else—
The saints must bear with me, impute the fault
To a soul i' the bud, so starved by ignorance,
Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year
Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know.
But if meanwhile some insect with a heart
Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy—
Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,
Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,
Comfort against the cold,—what though excess
Of comfort should miscall the creature—sun?
What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands
Petal by petal, crude and colourless,
Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!

Is all told? There's the journey: and where's time
To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?
Yet certain points do press on me too hard.
Each place must have a name, though I forget:
How strange it was—there where the plain begins
And the small river mitigates its flow—
When eve was fading fast, and my soul sank,
And he divined what surge of bitterness,
In overtaking me, would float me back
Whence I was carried by the striding day—
So,—"This grey place was famous once," said he—
And he began that legend of the place
As if in answer to the unspoken fear,
And told me all about a brave man dead,
Which lifted me and let my soul go on!
How did he know too,—at that town's approach
By the rock-side,—that in coming near the signs
Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower,
I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world
Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,
As if the broken circlet joined again,
Tightened itself about me with no break,—
As if the town would turn Arezzo's self,—
The husband there,—the friends my enemies,
All ranged against me, not an avenue
To try, but would be blocked and drive me back
On him,—this other, . . . oh the heart in that!
Did not he find, bring, put into my arms
A new-born babe?—and I saw faces beam
Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
And gossips round expecting my surprise
At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven.
I could believe himself by his strong will

Had woven around me what I thought the world
We went along in, every circumstance,
Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
For, through the journey, was it natural
Such comfort should arise from first to last?
As I look back, all is one milky way;
Still bettered more, the more remembered, so
Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him—
Him I now see make the shine everywhere.
Even at the last when the bewildered flesh,
The cloud of weariness about my soul
Clogging too heavily, sucked down all sense,—
Still its last voice was, "He will watch and care;
"Let the strength go, I am content: he stays!"
I doubt not he did stay and care for all—
From that sick minute when the head swam round,
And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
As in his arms he caught me, and, you say,
Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
And laid me where I next returned to life
In the other red of morning, two red plates
That crushed together, crushed the time between,
And are since then a solid fire to me,—
When in, my dreadful husband and the world
Broke,—and I saw him, master, by hell's right,
And saw my angel helplessly held back
By guards that helped the malice—the lamb prone,
The serpent towering and triumphant—then
Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
The adequate protest: for a worm must turn
If it would have its wrong observed by God.
I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
The neutralizer of all good and truth.
If I sinned so,—never obey voice more
O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us—"Bear!"
Not—"Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!"
I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
Not save myself,—no—nor my child unborn!
Had I else waited patiently till now?—
Who saw my old kind parents, silly-sooth
And too much trustful, for their worst of faults,
Cheated, brow-beaten, stripped and starved, cast out
Into the kennel: I remonstrated,
Then sank to silence, for,—their woes at end,
Themselves gone,—only I was left to plague.
If only I was threatened and belied,
What matter? I could bear it and did bear;
It was a comfort, still one lot for all:
They were not persecuted for my sake
And I, estranged, the single happy one.
But when at last, all by myself I stood
Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise,
Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,
And take the angel's hand was sent to help—
And found the old adversary athwart the path—
Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
The very angel's self made foul i' the face
By the fiend who struck there,—that I would not bear,
That only I resisted! So, my first
And last resistance was invincible.
Prayers move God; threats, and nothing else, move men!
I must have prayed a man as he were God
When I implored the Governor to right
My parents' wrongs: the answer was a smile.
The Archbishop,—did I clasp his feet enough,
Hide my face hotly on them, while I told
More than I dared make my own mother know?
The profit was—compassion and a jest.
This time, the foolish prayers were done with, right

Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
All was against the combat: vantage, mine?
The runaway avowed, the accomplice-wife,
In company with the plan-contriving priest?
Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare,
At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
And off it withered, cobweb-armoury
Against the lightning! 'Twas truth singed the lies
And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech!

You see, I will not have the service fail!
I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!
Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand
Traced round about with white to front the world.
What of the calumny I came across,
What o' the way to the end?—the end crowns all.
The judges judged aright i' the main, gave me
The uttermost of my heart's desire, a truce
From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt,
With the quiet nuns,—God recompense the good!
Who said and sang away the ugly past.
And, when my final fortune was revealed,
What safety while, amid my parents' arms,
My babe was given me! Yes, he saved my babe:
It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
Through that Arezzo noise and trouble: back
Had it returned nor ever let me see!
But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live
And give my bird the life among the leaves
God meant him! Weeks and months of quietude,
I could lie in such peace and learn so much—
Begin the task, I see how needful now,
Of understanding somewhat of my past,—
Know life a little, I should leave so soon.
Therefore, because this man restored my soul,
All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
As well as suffered,—nay, got foretaste too
Of better life beginning where this ends—
All through the breathing-while allowed me thus,
Which let good premonitions reach my soul
Unthwarted, and benignant influence flow
And interpenetrate and change my heart,
Uncrossed by what was wicked,—nay, unkind.
For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh,
Nobody did me one disservice more,
Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine
A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
All women are not mothers of a boy,
Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
As if it would continue, broaden out
Happily more and more, and lead to heaven:
Christmas before me,—was not that a chance?
I never realized God's birth before—
How he grew likest God in being born.
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers.
So all went on till, just four days ago—
The night and the tap.

Oh it shall be success
To the whole of our poor family! My friends
. . . Nay, father and mother,—give me back my word!
They have been rudely stripped of life, disgraced
Like children who must needs go clothed too fine,
Carry the garb of Carnival in Lent.
If they too much affected frippery,

They have been punished and submit themselves,
Say no word: all is over, they see God
Who will not be extreme to mark their fault
Or He had granted respite: they are safe.

For that most woeful man my husband once,
Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,
I—pardon him? So far as lies in me,
I give him for his good the life he takes,
Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.
Let him make God amends,—none, none to me
Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,
Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine
Flies forth exultingly at any door,
Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.
We shall not meet in this world nor the next,
But where will God be absent? In His face
Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!
And as my presence was importunate,—
My earthly good, temptation and a snare,—
Nothing about me but drew somehow down
His hate upon me,—somewhat so excused
Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him,—
May my evanishment for evermore
Help further to relieve the heart that cast
Such object of its natural loathing forth!
So he was made; he nowise made himself:
I could not love him, but his mother did.
His soul has never lain beside my soul:
But for the unresisting body,—thanks!
He burned that garment spotted by the flesh.
Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
It caught, and disinfection it had craved
Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
So as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell!

Even for my babe, my boy, there's safety thence—
From the sudden death of me, I mean: we poor
Weak souls, how we endeavour to be strong!
I was already using up my life,—
This portion, now, should do him such a good,
This other go to keep off such an ill!
The great life; see, a breath and it is gone!
So is detached, so left all by itself
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier: if my babe
Outlived the hour—and he has lived two weeks—
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
Why should I doubt He will explain in time
What I feel now, but fail to find the words?
My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all—
Only his mother's, born of love not hate!
So shall I have my rights in after-time.
It seems absurd, impossible to-day;
So seems so much else, not explained but known!

Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
No more now: I withdraw from earth and man
To my own soul, compose myself for God.

Well, and there is more! Yes, my end of breath
Shall bear away my soul in being true!
He is still here, not outside with the world,
Here, here; I have him in his rightful place!
'Tis now, when I am most upon the move,
I feel for what I verily find—again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own,

Who put his breast between the spears and me.
Ever with Caponsacchi! Otherwise
Here alone would be failure, loss to me—
How much more loss to him, with life debarred
From giving life, love locked from love's display,
The day-star stopped its task that makes night morn!
O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death!
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread—
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!
Tell him that if I seem without him now,
That's the world's insight! Oh, he understands!
He is at Civita—do I once doubt
The world again is holding us apart?
He had been here, displayed in my behalf
The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
And flashed the word God gave him, back to man!
I know where the free soul is flown! My fate
Will have been hard for even him to bear:
Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
Showing how holily he dared the deed!
And, for the rest,—say, from the deed, no touch
Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
Not one faint fleck of failure! Why explain?
What I see, oh, he sees and how much more!
Tell him,—I know not wherefore the true word
Should fade and fall unuttered at the last—
It was the name of him I sprang to meet
When came the knock, the summons and the end.
"My great heart, my strong hand are back again!"
I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven:
He is ordained to call and I to come!
Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
Say,—I am all in flowers from head to foot!
Say,—not one flower of all he said and did,
Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
At this supreme of moments! He is a priest;
He cannot marry therefore, which is right:
I think he would not marry if he could.
Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable:
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'Tis there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage but are as the angels: right,
Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much,—birth, power, repute so much,
Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these!
Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage; they are man and wife at once
When the true time is: here we have to wait
Not so long neither! Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

VIII.—DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS,

PAUPERUM PROCURATOR.[1]

[This Book is so full of Latin, and the humour of it turns so much upon Latin phrases, as hardly to repay the trouble of reading to any one not acquainted with that language. Under these circumstances, it would seem to be merely cumbrous and ineffective to give a translation throughout.]

Ah, my Giacinto, he's no ruddy rogue,
Is not Cinone?[2] What, to-day we're eight?
Seven and one's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!
—Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,
Amo -as -avi -atum -are -ans,
Up to *-aturus*, person, tense, and mood,
*Qui*es *me cum subjunctivo* (I could cry)
And chews Corderius[3] with his morning crust!
Look eight years onward, and he's perched, he's perched
Dapper and deft on stool beside this chair,
Cinozzo, Cinoncello, who but he?
—Trying his milk-teeth on some crusty case
Like this, papa shall triturate full soon
To smooth Papinianian[4] pulp!
It trots
Already through my head, though noon be now,
Does supper-time and what belongs to eve.
Dispose, O Don, o' the day, first work then play!
—The proverb bids. And "then" means, won't we hold
Our little yearly lovesome frolic feast,
Cinuolo's birth-night, Cinicello's own,
That makes gruff January grin perforce!
For too contagious grows the mirth, the warmth
Escaping from so many hearts at once—
When the good wife, buxom and bonny yet,
Jokes the hale grandsire,—such are just the sort
To go off suddenly,—he who hides the key
O' the box beneath his pillow every night,—
Which box may hold a parchment (someone thinks)
Will show a scribbled something like a name
"Cinino, Ciniccino," near the end,
"To whom I give and I bequeath my lands,
"Estates, tenements, hereditaments,
"When I decease as honest grandsire ought."
Wherefore—yet this one time again perhaps—
Shan't my Orvieto fuddle his old nose!
Then, uncles, one or the other, well i' the world,
May—drop in, merely?—trudge through rain and wind,
Rather! The smell-feasts rouse them at the hint
There's cookery in a certain dwelling-place!
Gossips, too, each with keepsake in his poke,
Will pick the way, thrid lane by lantern-light,
And so find door, put galligaskin off
At entry of a decent domicile
Cornered in snug Condotti,—all for love,
All to crush cup with Cinucciatolo!
Well,
Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp!
How vain are chambering and wantonness,
Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad!
Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
Altar and hearth! These, with a brisk career,
A source of honest profit and good fame,
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honouring God and serving man,—I say,
These are reality, and all else,—fluff,
Nutshell and naught,—thank Flaccus[5] for the phrase!
Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!

[1] *Pauperum Procurator:* the official defender of criminals, as the "Fisc" is the official prosecutor.

[2] *Cinone:* a pet diminutive of Giacinto, as are Cinozzo, Cinoncello, Cinino, and various other forms occurring in this Book.

[3] *Corderius:* Mathurin Cordier, author of the most popular Latin school-book of the sixteenth century, the *Colloquia Scholastica*.

[4] *Papinianian:* from Papinius, a Roman jurist of the beginning of the third century.

[5] *Flaccus:* Horace, *Sat.* II. 5, 35, *quassa nuce*, a proverbial expression for something worthless.

Why, work with a will, then! Wherefore lazy now?
Turn up the hour-glass, whence no sand-grain slips
But should have done its duty to the saint
O' the day, the son and heir that's eight years old!
Let law come dimple Cinoncino's cheek,
And Latin dumple Cinarello's chin,
The while we spread him fine and toss him flat
This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass
Of matter into Argument the First,
Prime Pleading in defence of our accused,
Which, once a-waft on paper wing, shall soar,
Shall signalize before applausive Rome
What study, and mayhap some mother-wit,
Can do toward making Master fop and Fisc
Old bachelor Bottinius bite his thumb.
Now, how good God is! How falls plumb to point
This murder, gives me Guido to defend
Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy
Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
For some such illustration from his sire,
Stimulus to himself! One might wait years
And never find the chance which now finds me!
The fact is, there's a blessing on the hearth,
A special providence for fatherhood!
Here's a man, and what's more, a noble, kills
—Not sneakingly but almost with parade—
Wife's father and wife's mother and wife's self
That's mother's self of son and heir (like mine!)
—And here stand I, the favoured advocate,
Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon
Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match,
And set the same in Cinoncino's cap!
I defend Guido and his comrades—I!
Pray God, I keep me humble: not to me—
Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus!
How the fop chuckled when they made him Fisc!
We'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love,
All for our tribute to Cinotto's day.
Why, 'sbuddikins, old Innocent himself
May rub his eyes at the bustle,—ask "What's this
"Rolling from out the rostrum, as a gust
"O' the *Pro Milone*[1] had been prisoned there,
"And rattled Rome awake?" Awaken Rome,
How can the Pope doze on in decency?
He needs must wake up also, speak his word,
Have his opinion like the rest of Rome,
About this huge, this hurly-burly case:
He wants who can excogitate the truth,
Give the result in speech, plain black and white,
To mumble in the mouth and make his own
—A little changed, good man, a little changed!
No matter, so his gratitude be moved,
By when my Giacintino gets of age,
Mindful of who thus helped him at a pinch,
Archangelus *Procurator Pauperum*—
And proved Hortensius[2] *Redivivus!* Whew!
To earn the *Est-est*, merit the minced herb
That mollifies the liver's leathery slice,
With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,
Cemented in an element of cheese!
I doubt if dainties do the grandsire good:
Last June he had a sort of strangling . . . bah!
He's his own master, and his will is made.
So, liver fizz, law flit and Latin fly
As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace!
May I lose cause if I vent one word more
Except,—with fresh-cut quill we ink the white,—
P-r-o-pro Guidone et Sociis. There!

Count Guido married—or, in Latin due,
What? *Duxit in uxorem?*—commonplace!
Tædas jugales iniit, subiit,—ha!
He underwent the matrimonial torch?

[1] *Pro Milone:* Cicero's great speech in defence of Milo on a charge of murder.
[2] *Hortensius:* the great Roman orator, contemporary with Cicero.

Connubio stabili sibi junxit,—hum !
In stable bond of marriage bound his own ?
That's clear of any modern taint : and yet . . .

Virgil is little help to who writes prose.
He shall attack me Terence with the dawn,
Shall Cinuccino ! Mum, mind business, Sir !
Thus circumstantially evolve we facts,
Ita se habet ideo series facti :
He wedded,—ah, with owls for augury !
Nupserat, heu sinistris avibus,
One of the blood Arezzo boasts her best,
Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus,
Pompiliæ . . .

But the version afterward !
Curb we this ardour ! Notes alone, to-day,
The speech to-morrow and the Latin last :
Such was the rule in Farinacci's time.
Indeed I hitched it into verse and good.
Unluckily, law quite absorbs a man,
Or else I think I too had poetized.
" Law is the pork substratum of the fry,
"Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity,"—
And in this case, if circumstance assist,
We'll garnish law with idiom, never fear !
Out-of-the-way events extend our scope :
For instance, when Bottini brings his charge,
" That letter which you say Pompilia wrote,—
" To criminate her parents and herself
" And disengage her husband from the coil,—
" That, Guido Franceschini wrote, say we :
" Because Pompilia could nor read nor write,
" Therefore he pencilled her such letter first,
"Then made her trace in ink the same again."
—Ha, my Bottini, have I thee on hip ?
How will he turn this and break Tully's pate ?
" *Existimandum* " (don't I hear the dog !)
" *Quod Guido designaverit elementa*
" *Dictæ epistolæ, quæ fuerint*
" (*Superinducto ab ea calamo*)
" *Notata atramento*"—there's a style !—
" *Quia ipsa scribere nesciebat.*" Boh !
Now, my turn ! Either, *Insulse !* (I outburst)
Stupidly put ! Inane is the response,
Inanis est responsio, or the like—
To-wit, that each of all those characters,
Quod singula elementa epistolæ,
Had first of all been traced for her by him,
Fuerant per eum prius designata,
And then, the ink applied a-top of that,
Et deinde, superinducto calamo,
The piece, she says, became her handiwork,
Per eam, efformata, ut ipsa asserit.
Inane were such response ! (a second time :)
Her husband outlined her the whole, forsooth ?
Vir ejus lineabat epistolam ?
What, she confesses that she wrote the thing,
Fatetur eam scripsisse, (scorn that scathes !)
That she might pay obedience to her lord ?
Ut viro obtemperaret, apices
(Here repeat charge with proper varied phrase)
Eo designante, ipsaque calamum
Super inducente ? By such argument,
Ita pariter, she seeks to show the same,
(Ay, by Saint Joseph and what saints you please)
Epistolam ostendit, medius fidius,
No voluntary deed but fruit of force !
Non voluntarie sed coacte scriptam !
That's the way to write Latin, friend my Fisc !
Bottini is a beast, one barbarous :
Look out for him when he attempts to say
" Armed with a pistol, Guido followed her ! "
Will not I be beforehand with my Fisc,
Cut away phrase by phrase from underfoot !
Guido Pompiliam—Guido thus his wife
Following with igneous engine, shall I have ?
Armis munitus igneis persequens—
Arma sulphurea gestans, sulphury arms,
Or, might one style a pistol—popping-piece ?
Armatus breviori sclopulo ?
We'll let him have been armed so, though it make
Somewhat against us : I had thought to own—
Provided with a simple travelling-sword,
Ense solummodo viatorio
Instructus : but we'll grant the pistol here :
Better we lost the cause than lacked the gird
At the Fisc's Latin, lost the Judge's laugh !
It's Venturini that decides for style.
Tommati rather goes upon the law.
So, as to law,—

Ah, but with law ne'er hope
To level the fellow,—don't I know his trick!
How he draws up, ducks under, twists aside!
He's a lean-gutted hectic rascal, fine
As pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends
'Tis ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout.
He eludes law by piteous looks aloft,
Lets Latin glance off as he makes appeal
To saint that's somewhere in the ceiling-top:
Do you suppose I don't conceive the beast?
Plague of the ermine-vermin! For it takes,
It takes, and here's the fellow Fisc, you see,
And Judge, you'll not be long in seeing next!
Confound the fop—he's now at work like me:
Enter his study, as I seem to do,
Hear him read out his writing to himself!
I know he writes as if he spoke: I hear
The hoarse shrill throat, see shut eyes, neck shot-forth,
—I see him strain on tiptoe, soar and pour
Eloquence out, nor stay nor stint at all—
Perorate in the air, then quick to press
With the product! What abuse of type and sheet!
He'll keep clear of my cast, my logic-throw,
Let argument slide, and then deliver swift
Some bowl from quite an unguessed point of stand—
Having the luck o' the last word, the reply!
A plaguy cast, a mortifying stroke:
You face a fellow—cries "So, there you stand?
"But I discourteous jump clean o'er your head!
"You take ship-carpentry for pilotage,
"Stop rat-holes, while a sea sweeps through the breach,—
"Hammer and fortify at puny points?
"Do, clamp and tenon, make all tight and safe!
"'Tis here and here and here you ship a sea,
"No good of your stopped leaks and littleness!"

Yet what do I name "little and a leak"?
The main defence o' the murder's used to death,
By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap we pick:
Safer I worked the new, the unforeseen,
The nice by-stroke, the fine and improvised
Point that can titillate the brain o' the Bench
Torpid with over-teaching, long ago!
As if Tommati (that has heard, reheard
And heard again, first this side and then that—
Guido and Pietro, Pietro and Guido, din
And deafen, full three years, at each long ear)
Don't want amusement for instruction now,
Won't rather feel a flea run o'er his ribs,
Than a daw settle heavily on his head!
Oh I was young and had the trick of fence,
Knew subtle pass and push with careless right—
My left arm ever quiet behind back,
With dagger ready: not both hands to blade!
Puff and blow, put the strength out, Blunderbore!
There's my subordinate, young Spreti, now,
Pedant and prig,—he'll pant away at proof,
That's his way!

Now for mine—to rub some life
Into one's choppy fingers this cold day!
I trust Cinuzzo ties on tippet, guards
The precious throat on which so much depends!
Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
Despite the prison-straw: bad Carnival
For captives! no sliced fry for him, poor Count!

Carnival-time,—another providence!
The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
To edify, to give one's name and fame
In charge of, till they find, some future day,
Cintino come and claim it, his name too,
Pledge of the pleasantness they owe papa—
Who else was it cured Rome of her great qualms,
When she must needs have her own judgment?—ay,
When all her topping wits had set to work,
Pronounced already on the case: mere boys,
Twice Cineruggiolo's age with half his sense,
As good as tell me, when I cross the court,
"Master Arcangeli!" (plucking at my gown)
"We can predict, we comprehend your play,
"We'll help you save your client." Tra-la-la!
I've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour,

To have the town anticipate my track?
The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,
The young hound's predilection,—prints the dew,
Don't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw?
No! Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush,
Thus I defend Count Guido.
Where are we weak?
First, which is foremost in advantage too,
Our murder,—we call, killing,—is a fact
Confessed, defended, made a boast of: good!
To think the Fisc claimed use of torture here,
And got thereby avowal plump and plain
That gives me just the chance I wanted,—scope
Not for brute-force but ingenuity,
Explaining matters, not denying them!
One may dispute,—as I am bound to do,
And shall,—validity of process here:
Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
From torture which plebeians undergo
In such a case: for law is lenient, lax,
Remits the torture to a nobleman
Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
Attaches to a man born vulgarly:
We don't card silk with comb that dresses wool.
Moreover 'twas severity undue
In this case, even had the lord been lout.
What utters, on this head, our oracle,
Our Farinacci,[1] my Gamaliel erst,
In those immortal "Questions"? This I quote:
"Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure
"That named *Vigiliarum* is the best—
"That is, the worst—to whoso needs must bear:
"Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
"To ten; (beyond ten, we've no precedent;
"Certain have touched their ten, but, bah, they died!)
"It does so efficaciously convince,
"That, — speaking by much observation here,—
"Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
"Never I knew of patients beyond four
"Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six
"End by succumbing: only martyrs four,
"Of obstinate silence, guilty or no,—against
"Ninety-six full confessors, innocent
"Or otherwise,—so shrewd a tool have we!"
No marvel either: in unwary hands,
Death on the spot is no rare consequence:
As indeed all but happened in this case
To one of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse,
Not modify your treatment to a man:
So, two successive days he fainted dead,
And only on the third essay, gave up,
Confessed like flesh and blood. We could reclaim,—
Blockhead Bottini giving cause enough!
But no,—we'll take it as spontaneously
Confessed: we'll have the murder beyond doubt.
Ah, fortunate (the poet's word[2] reversed)
Inasmuch as we know our happiness!
Had the antagonist left dubiety,
Here were we proving murder a mere myth,
And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent,—ay,
Absent! He was—why, where should Christian be?—
Engaged in visiting his proper church,
The duty of us all at Christmas-time,
When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
To madness by his relegation, cast
About him and contrived a remedy
In murder: since opprobrium broke afresh,
By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire,
He it was quietly sought to smother up
His shame and theirs together,—killed the three,

[1] *Farinacci:* Prosper Farinacci (1544–1613), author of a volume of *Variæ Quæstiones* and other legal treatises, which were regarded as of very high authority during the seventeenth century. In 1599 he defended Beatrice Cenci on the charge of murdering her father.

[2] *The poet's word:* "O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas" (Virgil, *Georg.* II. 458).

And fled—(go seek him where you please to search)—
Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,
Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
"Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!"—
And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
He came but to forgive and bring to life.
Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul?
"Is thine eye evil because mine is good?"

So, doubtless, had I needed argue here
But for the full confession round and sound!
Thus might you wrong some kingly alchemist,—
Whose concern should not be with showing brass
Transmuted into gold, but triumphing,
Rather, about his gold changed out of brass,
Not vulgarly to the mere sight and touch,
But in the idea, the spiritual display,
The apparition buoyed by winged words
Hovering above its birth-place in the brain,—
Thus would you wrong this excellent personage
Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,
Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows,—in a word,
Demonstrate: when a faulty pipkin's crack
May disconcert you his presumptive truth!
Here were I hanging to the testimony
Of one of these poor rustics—four, ye gods!
Whom the first taste of friend the Fiscal's cord
May drive into undoing my whole speech,
Undoing, on his birthday,—what is worse,—
My son and heir!
I wonder, all the same,
Not so much at those peasants' lack of heart;
But—Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
Bear pain no better! Everybody knows
It used once, when my father was a boy,
To form a proper, nay, important point
I' the education of our well-born youth,
That they took torture handsomely at need,
Without confessing in this clownish guise.
Each noble had his rack for private use,
And would, for the diversion of a guest,
Bid it be set up in the yard of arms,
And take thereon his hour of exercise,—
Command the varletry stretch, strain their best,
While friends looked on, admired my lord could smile
'Mid tugging which had caused an ox to roar.
Men are no longer men!

—And advocates
No longer Farinacci, let us add,
If I one more time fly from point proposed!
So, *Vindicatio*,—here begins the speech!—
Honoris causa; thus we make our stand:
Honour in us had injury, we prove.
Or if we fail to prove such injury
More than misprision of the fact,—what then?
It is enough, authorities declare,
If the result, the deed in question now,
Be caused by confidence that injury
Is veritable and no figment: since,
What, though proved fancy afterward, seemed fact
At the time, they argue shall excuse result.
That which we do, persuaded of good cause
For what we do, hold justifiable!—
So casuists bid: man, bound to do his best,
They would not have him leave that best undone
And mean to do his worst,—though fuller light
Show best was worst and worst would have been best.
Act by the present light!—they ask of man.
Ultra quod hic non agitur, besides
It is not anyway our business here,
De probatione adulterii,
To prove what we thought crime was crime indeed,
Ad irrogandam pœnam, and require
Its punishment: such nowise do we seek:
Sed ad effectum, but 'tis our concern,
Excusandi, here to simply find excuse,
Occisorem, for who did the killing-work,
Et ad illius defensionem, (mark
The difference) and defend the man, just that!
Quo casu levior probatio

Exuberaret, to which end far lighter proof
Suffices than the prior case would claim:
It should be always harder to convict,
In short, than to establish innocence.
Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all
That Honour is a gift of God to man
Precious beyond compare: which natural sense
Of human rectitude and purity,—
Which white, man's soul is born with,—brooks no touch:
Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all,
Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
Is,—honour within honour, like the eye
Centred i' the ball,—the honour of our wife.
Touch us o' the pupil of our honour, then,
Not actually,—since so you slay outright,—
But by a gesture simulating touch,
Presumable mere menace of such taint,—
This were our warrant for eruptive ire
"To whose dominion[1] I impose no end."

(Virgil, now, should not be too difficult
To Cinoncino,—say, the early books.
Pen, truce to further gambols! *Poscimur!*)

Nor can revenge of injury done here
To the honour proved the life and soul of us,
Be too excessive, too extravagant:
Such wrong seeks and must have complete revenge.
Show we this, first, on the mere natural ground:
Begin at the beginning, and proceed
Incontrovertibly. Theodoric,[2]
In an apt sentence Cassiodorus cites,
Propounds for basis of all household law—
I hardly recollect it, but it ends,
"Bird mates with bird, beast genders with his like,
"And brooks no interference." Bird and beast?

The very insects . . . if they wive or no,
How dare I say when Aristotle doubts?
But the presumption is they likewise wive,
At least the nobler sorts; for take the bee
As instance,—copying King Solomon,—
Why that displeasure of the bee to aught
Which savours of incontinency, makes
The unchaste a very horror to the hive?
Whence comes it bees obtain their epithet
Of *castæ apes*, notably "the chaste"?
Because, ingeniously saith Scaliger,
(The young sage,—see his book of Table-talk)
"Such is their hatred of immodest act,
"They fall upon the offender, sting to death."
I mind a passage much confirmative
I' the Idyllist (though I read him Latinized)
"Why" asks a shepherd, "is this bank unfit
"For celebration of our vernal loves?"
"Oh swain," returns the instructed shepherdess,
"Bees swarm here, and would quick resent our warmth!"
Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here,
Nor gain nor guard connubiality:
But beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous,
Do credit to their beasthood: witness him
That Ælian[3] cites, the noble elephant,
(Or if not Ælian, somebody as sage)
Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
His master's friend exceed in courtesy
The due allowance to his master's wife,
Taught them good manners and killed both at once,
Making his master and the world admire.
Indubitably, then, that master's self,
Favoured by circumstance, had done the same
Or else stood clear rebuked by his own beast.
Adeo, ut qui honorem spernit, thus,
Who values his own honour not a straw,—
Et non recuperare curat, nor
Labours by might and main to salve its wound,
Se ulciscendo, by revenging him,
Nil differat a belluis, is a brute,

[1] *To whose dominion*, &c.: "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; Imperium sine fine dedi" (Virgil, *Æn.* I. 278, 279).

[2] *Theodoric*: the Goth, king of Italy, 493-526. Cassiodorus was his secretary.

[3] *Ælian*: in his *De Nat. Anim.* XI. 15.

Quinimo irrationabilior
Ipsismet belluis, nay, contrariwise,
Much more irrational than brutes themselves,
Should be considered, *reputetur!* How?
If a poor animal feel honour smart,
Taught by blind instinct nature plants in him,
Shall man, — confessed creation's master-stroke,
Nay, intellectual glory, nay, a god,
Nay, of the nature of my Judges here,—
Shall man prove the insensible, the block,
The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace?
(Come, that's both solid and poetic!) Man
Derogate, live for the low tastes alone,
Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
Absit such homage to vile flesh and blood!

(May Gigia have remembered, nothing stings
Fried liver out of its monotony
Of richness, like a root of fennel, chopped
Fine with the parsley: parsley-sprigs, I said—
Was there need I should say "and fennel too"?
But no, she cannot have been so obtuse!
To our argument! The fennel will be chopped.)

From beast to man next mount we—ay, but, mind,
Still mere man, not yet Christian,—that, in time!
Not too fast, mark you! 'Tis on Heathen grounds
We next defend our act: then, fairly urge—
If this were done of old, in a green tree,
Allowed in the Spring rawness of our kind,
What may be licensed in the Autumn dry
And ripe, the latter harvest-tide of man?
If, with his poor and primitive half-lights,
The Pagan, whom our devils served for gods,
Could stigmatise the breach of marriage-vow
As that which blood, blood only might efface,—
Absolve the husband, outraged, whose revenge
Anticipated law, plied sword himself,—
How with the Christian in full blaze of noon?
Shall not he rather double penalty,
Multiply vengeance, than, degenerate,
Let privilege be minished, droop, decay?
Therefore set forth at large the ancient law!
Superabundant the examples be
To pick and choose from. The Athenian Code,
Solon's, the name is serviceable,—then,
The Laws of the Twelve Tables, that fifteenth,—
"Romulus" likewise rolls out round and large;
The Julian; the Cornelian;[1] Gracchus' Law:
So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves!
Spreti can set that going if he please,
I point you, for my part, the belfry plain,
Intent to rise from dusk, *diluculum*,
Into the Christian day shall broaden next.

First, the fit compliment to His Holiness
Happily reigning: then sustain the point—
All that was long ago declared as law
By the natural revelation, stands confirmed
By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint,—
To-wit—that Honour is man's supreme good.
Why should I baulk Saint Jerome of his phrase?
Ubi honor non est, where no honour is,
Ibi contemptus est; and where contempt,
Ibi injuria frequens; and where that,
The frequent injury, *ibi et indignatio;*
And where the indignation, *ibi quies*
Nulla: and where there is no quietude,
Why, *ibi*, there, the mind is often cast
Down from the heights where it proposed to dwell,
Mens a proposito sæpe dejicitur.
And naturally the mind is so cast down,
Since harder 'tis, *quum difficilius sit*,
Iram cohibere, to coerce one's wrath,
Quam miracula facere, than work miracles,—
So Gregory smiles in his First Dialogue.
Whence we infer, the ingenuous soul, the man
Who makes esteem of honour and repute,
Whenever honour and repute are touched,
Arrives at term of fury and despair,
Loses all guidance from the reason-check:

[1] *The Julian; the Cornelian: see* Book I. ll. 226, 227.

As in delirium or a frenzy-fit,
Nor fury nor despair he satiates,—no,
Not even if he attain the impossible,
O'erturn the hinges of the universe
To annihilate—not whoso caused the smart
Solely, the author simply of his pain,
But the place, the memory, *vituperii*,
O' the shame and scorn: *quia*,—says Solomon,
(The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth
In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end)
—Because, the zeal and fury of a man,
Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,
Non parcet, in the day of his revenge,
In die vindictæ, nor will acquiesce,
Nec acquiescet, through a person's prayers,
Cujusdam precibus,—nec suscipiet,
Nor yet take, *pro redemptione*, for
Redemption, *dona plurium*, gifts of friends,
Mere money-payment to compound for ache.
Who recognizes not my client's case?
Whereto, as strangely consentaneous here,
Adduce Saint Bernard in the Epistle writ
To Robertulus, his nephew: "Too much grief,
"*Dolor quippe nimius non deliberat*,
"Does not excogitate propriety,
"*Non verecundatur*, nor knows shame at all,
"*Non consulit rationem*, nor consults
"Reason, *non dignitatis metuit*
"*Damnum*, nor dreads the loss of dignity;
"*Modum et ordinem*, order and the mode,
"*Ignorat*, it ignores:" why, trait for trait,
Was ever portrait limned so like the life?
(By Cavalier Maratta, shall I say?
I hear he's first in reputation now.)
Yes, that of Samson in the Sacred Text
That's not so much the portrait as the man!
Samson in Gaza was the antetype
Of Guido at Rome: observe the Nazarite!
Blinded he was,—an easy thing to bear:
Intrepidly he took imprisonment,
Gyves, stripes and daily labour at the mill:
But when he found himself, i' the public place,
Destined to make the common people sport,
Disdain burned up with such an impetus
I' the breast of him that, all the man one fire,
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,
Anima mea, with the Philistines!
So, pulled down pillar, roof, and death and all,
Multosque plures interfecit, ay,
And many more he killed thus, *moriens*,
Dying, *quam vivus*, than in his whole life,
Occiderat, he ever killed before.
Are these things writ for no example, Sirs?
One instance more, and let me see who doubts!
Our Lord Himself, made all of mansuetude,
Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received
Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting
Without complaint: but when He found Himself
Touched in His honour never so little for once,
Then outbroke indignation pent before—
"*Honorem meum nemini dabo!*" "No,
"My honour I to nobody will give!"
And certainly the example so hath wrought,
That whosoever, at the proper worth,
Apprises worldly honour and repute,
Esteems it nobler to die honoured man
Beneath Mannaia, than live centuries
Disgraced in the eye o' the world. We find Saint Paul
No recreant to this faith delivered once:
"Far worthier were it that I died," cries he,
Expedit mihi magis mori, "than
"That anyone should make my glory void,"
Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!
See, *ad Corinthienses:* whereupon
Saint Ambrose makes a comment with much fruit,
Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart,
So I desist from bringing forward here.
(I can't quite recollect it.)

Have I proved
Satis superque, both enough and to spare,
That Revelation old and new admits
The natural man may effervesce in ire,
O'erflood earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage,
At the first puncture to his self-respect?

Then, Sirs, this Christian dogma, this law-bud
Full-blown now, soon to bask the absolute flower
Of Papal doctrine in our blaze of day,—
Bethink you, shall we miss one promise-streak,
One doubtful birth of dawn crepuscular,
One dew-drop comfort to humanity,
Now that the chalice teems with noonday wine?
Yea, argue Molinists who bar revenge—
Referring just to what makes out our case!
Under old dispensation, argue they,
The doom of the adulterous wife was death,
Stoning by Moses' law. "Nay, stone her not,
"Put her away!" next legislates our Lord;
And last of all, "Nor yet divorce a wife!"
Ordains the Church, "she typifies ourself,
"The Bride no fault shall cause to fall from Christ."
Then, as no jot nor tittle of the Law
Has passed away—which who presumes to doubt?
As not one word of Christ is rendered vain—
Which, could it be though heaven and earth should pass?
—Where do I find my proper punishment
For my adulterous wife, I humbly ask
Of my infallible Pope,—who now remits
Even the divorce allowed by Christ in lieu
Of lapidation Moses licensed me?
The Gospel checks the Law which throws the stone,
The Church tears the divorce-bill Gospel grants:
Shall wives sin and enjoy impunity?
What profits me the fulness of the days,
The final dispensation, I demand,
Unless Law, Gospel and the Church subjoin
"But who hath barred thee primitive revenge,
"Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns more fierce?
"Use thou thy natural privilege of man,
"Else wert thou found like those old ingrate Jews,
"Despite the manna-banquet on the board,
"A-longing after melons, cucumbers,
"And such like trash of Egypt left behind!"

(There was one melon had improved our soup:
But did not Cinoncino need the rind
To make a boat with? So I seem to think.)

Law, Gospel and the Church—from these we leap
To the very last revealment, easy rule
Befitting the well-born and thorough-bred
O' the happy day we live in, not the dark
O' the early rude and acorn-eating race.
"Behold," quoth James, "we bridle in a horse
"And turn his body as we would thereby!"
Yea, but we change the bit to suit the growth,
And rasp our colt's jaw with a rugged spike
We hasten to remit our managed steed
Who wheels round at persuasion of a touch.
Civilization bows to decency,
The acknowledged use and wont: 'tis manners,—mild
But yet imperative law,—which make the man.
Thus do we pay the proper compliment
To rank, and that society of Rome,
Hath so obliged us by its interest,
Taken our client's part instinctively,
As unaware defending its own cause.
What *dictum* doth Society lay down
I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife?
Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way?
Be patient and forgive? Oh, language fails,—
Shrinks from depicturing his turpitude!
For if wronged husband raise not hue and cry,
Quod si maritus de adulterio non
Conquereretur, he's presumed a—foh!
Presumitur leno: so, complain he must.
But how complain? At your tribunal, lords?
Far weightier challenge suits your sense, I wot!
You sit not to have gentlemen propose
Questions gentility can itself discuss.
Did not you prove that to our brother Paul?
The Abate, *quum judicialiter*

Prosequeretur, when he tried the law,
Guidonis causam, in Count Guido's case,
Accidit ipsi, this befell himself,
Quod risum moverit et cachinnos, that
He moved to mirth and cachinnation, all
Or nearly all, *fere in omnibus*
Etiam sensatis et cordatis, men
Strong-sensed, sound-hearted, nay, the very Court,
Ipsismet in judicibus, I might add,
Non tamen dicam. In a cause like this,
So multiplied were reasons *pro* and *con*,
Delicate, intertwisted and obscure,
That Law refused loan of a finger-tip
To unravel, re-adjust the hopeless twine,
Since, half-a-dozen steps outside Law's seat,
There stood a foolish trifler with a tool
A-dangle to no purpose by his side,
Had clearly cut the embroilment in a trice.
Asserunt enim unanimiter
Doctores, for the Doctors all assert,
That husbands, *quod mariti*, must be held
Viles, *cornuti reputantur*, vile,
Fronts branching forth a florid infamy,
Si propriis manibus, if with their own hands,
Non sumunt, they fail straight to take revenge,
Vindictam, but expect the deed be done
By the Court—*expectant illam fieri*
Per judices, *qui summopere rident*, which
Gives an enormous guffaw for reply,
Et cachinnantur. For he ran away,
Deliquit enim, just that he might 'scape
The censure of both counsellors and crowd,
Ut vulgi et doctorum evitaret
Censuram, and lest so he superadd
To loss of honour ignominy too,
Et sic ne istam quoque ignominiam
Amisso honori superadderet.
My lords, my lords, the inconsiderate step
Was—we referred ourselves to Law at all!
Twit me not with "Law else had punished you!"
Each punishment of the extra-legal step,
To which the high-born preferably revert,
Is ever for some oversight, some slip
I' the taking vengeance, not for vengeance' self.
A good thing, done unhandsomely, turns ill;
And never yet lacked ill the law's rebuke.
For pregnant instance, let us contemplate
The luck of Leonardus,—see at large
Of Sicily's Decisions sixty-first.
This Leonard finds his wife is false: what then?
He makes her own son snare her, and entice
Out of the town walls to a private walk
Wherein he slays her with commodity.
They find her body half-devoured by dogs:
Leonard is tried, convicted, punished, sent
To labour in the galleys seven years long:
Why? For the murder? Nay, but for the mode!
Malus modus occidendi, ruled the Court,
An ugly mode of killing, nothing more!
Another fructuous sample,—see "*De Re* "*Criminali*," in Matthæus' divine piece.
Another husband, in no better plight,
Simulates absence, thereby tempts his wife;
On whom he falls, out of sly ambuscade,
Backed by a brother of his, and both of them
Armed to the teeth with arms that law had blamed.
Nimis dolose, overwilily,
Fuisse operatum, did they work,
Pronounced the law: had all been fairly done
Law had not found him worthy, as she did,
Of four years' exile. Why cite more? Enough
Is good as a feast—(unless a birthday-feast
For one's Cinuccio) so, we finish here.
My lords, we rather need defend ourselves
Inasmuch as, for a twinkling of an eye,
We hesitatingly appealed to law,—
Than need deny that, on mature advice,
We blushingly bethought us, bade revenge
Back to its simple proper private way
Of decent self-dealt gentlemanly death.
Judges, here is the law, and here beside,
The testimony! Look to it!
Pause and breathe!
So far is only too plain; we must watch:
Bottini will scarce hazard an attack
Here: best anticipate the fellow's play,
And guard the weaker places—warily ask,
What if considerations of a sort,
Reasons of a kind, arise from out the strange
Peculiar unforeseen new circumstance

Of this our (candour owns) abnormal act,
To bar the right of us revenging so?
"Impunity were otherwise your meed:
"Go slay your wife and welcome,"—may be urged,—
"But why the innocent old couple slay,
"Pietro, Violante? You may do enough,
"Not too much, not exceed the golden mean:
"Neither brute-beast nor Pagan, Gentile, Jew,
"Nor Christian, no nor votarist of the mode,
"Is justified to push revenge so far."

No, indeed? Why, thou very sciolist!
The actual wrong, Pompilia seemed to do,
Was virtual wrong done by the parents here—
Imposing her upon us as their child—
Themselves allow: then, her fault was their fault,
Her punishment be theirs accordingly!
But wait a little, sneak not off so soon!
Was this cheat solely harm to Guido, pray?
The precious couple you call innocent,—
Why, they were felons that Law failed to clutch,
Qui ut fraudarent, who that they might rob,
Legitime vocatos, folk law called,
Ad fidei commissum, true heirs to the Trust,
Partum supposuerunt, feigned this birth,
Immemores reos factos esse, blind
To the fact that, guilty, they incurred thereby,
Ultimi supplicii, hanging or what's worse.
Do you blame us that we turn Law's instruments,
Not mere self-seekers,—mind the public weal,
Nor make the private good our sole concern?
That having—shall I say—secured a thief,
Not simply we recover from his pouch
The stolen article our property,
But also pounce upon our neighbour's purse
We opportunely find reposing there,
And do him justice while we right ourselves?
He owes us, for our part, a drubbing say,
But owes our neighbour just a dance i' the air
Under the gallows: so, we throttle him.
That neighbour's Law, that couple are the Thief,
We are the over ready to help Law—
Zeal of her house hath eaten us up: for which,
Can it be, Law intends to eat up us,
Crudum Priamum,[1] devour poor Priam raw,
('Twas Jupiter's own joke) with babes to boot,
Priamique pisinnos, in Homeric phrase?
Shame!——and so ends my period prettily.

But even,—prove the pair not culpable,
Free as unborn babe from connivance at,
Participation in, their daughter's fault:
Ours the mistake. Is that a rare event?
Non semel, it is anything but rare,
In contingentia facti, that by chance,
Impunes evaserunt, go scot-free,
Qui, such well-meaning people as ourselves,
Justo dolore moti, who aggrieved
With cause, *apposuerunt manus*, lay
Rough hands, *in innocentes*, on wrong heads.
Cite we an illustrative case in point:
Mulier Smirnea quædam, good my lords,
A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once,
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
Both husband and her son begot by him
Killed, *interfecerat*, *ex quo*, because,
Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
Had been beforehand with her, killed her son,
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him that sat
Proconsul, *nec duabus cædibus*
Contaminatam liberare, nor
To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
With murder, *voluit*, made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Justo dolore impulsam, one impelled
By just grief; *sed remisit*, but sent her up
Ad Areopagum, to the Hill of Mars,
Sapientissimorum judicum
Cœtum, to that assembly of the sage
Paralleled only by my judges here;
Ubi, *cognito de causa*, where, the cause
Well weighed, *responsum est*, they gave reply,
Ut ipsa et accusator, that both sides
O' the suit, *redirent*, should come back again,
Post centum annos, after a hundred years,

[1] *Crudum Priamum . . . Priamique pisinnos:* a line from a translation of Homer by Attius Labeo. The translation as a whole is lost, but this line (*Il.* IV. 35) is preserved by a scholiast on Persius.

For judgment; *et sic*, by which sage decree,
Duplici parricidio rea, one
Convicted of a double parricide,
Quamvis etiam innocentem, though in truth
Out of the pair, one innocent at least
She, *occidisset*, plainly had put to death,
Undequaque, yet she altogether 'scaped,
Evasit impunis. See the case at length
In Valerius, fittingly styled *Maximus*,
That eighth book of his Memorable Facts.
Nor Cyriacus cites beside the mark:
Similiter uxor quæ mandaverat,
Just so, a lady who had taken care,
Homicidium viri, that her lord be killed,
Ex denegatione debiti,
For denegation of a certain debt,
Matrimonialis, he was loth to pay,
Fuit pecuniaria mulcta, was
Amerced in a pecuniary mulct,
Punita, et ad pœnam, and to pains,
Temporalem, for a certain space of time,
In monasterio, in a convent.

(Ay,
In monasterio! He mismanages
In with the ablative, the accusative!
I had hoped to have hitched the villain into verse
For a gift, this very day, a complete list
O' the prepositions each with proper case,
Telling a story, long was in my head.
"What prepositions take the accusative?
Ad to or at—*who saw the cat?*—down to
Ob, for, because of, *keep her claws off!*" Tush!
Law in a man takes the whole liberty:
The muse is fettered: just as Ovid found!)

And now, sea widens and the coast is clear.
What of the dubious act you bade excuse?
Surely things broaden, brighten, till at length
Remains—so far from act that needs defence—
Apology to make for act delayed
One minute, let alone eight mortal months
Of hesitation! "Why procrastinate?"
(Out with it my Bottinius, ease thyself!)
"Right, promptly done, is twice right: right delayed
"Turns wrong. We grant you should have killed your wife,
"But killed o' the moment, at the meeting her
"In company with the priest: then did the tongue
"O' the Brazen Head give license, 'Time is now!'
"Wait to make mind up? 'Time is past' it peals.
"Friend, you are competent to mastery
"O' the passions that confessedly explain
"An outbreak: you allow an interval,
"And then break out as if time's clock still clanged.
"You have forfeited your chance, and flat you fall
"Into the commonplace category
"Of men bound to go softly all their days,
"Obeying Law."
Now, which way make response?
What was the answer Guido gave, himself?
—That so to argue came of ignorance
How honour bears a wound. "For, wound," said he,
"My body, and the smart soon mends and ends:
"While, wound my soul where honour sits and rules,
"Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain,
"Being *ex incontinenti*, fresh as first."
But try another tack, urge common sense
By way of contrast: say—Too true, my lords!
We did demur, awhile did hesitate:
Since husband sure should let a scruple speak
Ere he slay wife,—for his own safety, lords:
Carpers abound in this misjudging world:
Moreover, there's a nicety in law
That seems to justify them should they carp.
Suppose the source of injury a son,—
Father may slay such son yet run no risk:
Why graced with such a privilege? Because
A father so incensed with his own child,
Or must have reason, or believe he has:
Quia semper, seeing that in such event,
Presumitur, the law is bound suppose,
Quod capiat pater, that the sire must take,

Bonum consilium pro filio,
The best course as to what befits his boy,
Through instinct, *ex instinctu*, of mere love,
Amoris, and, *paterni*, fatherhood;
Quam confidentiam, which confidence,
Non habet, law declines to entertain,
De viro, of the husband: where finds he
An instinct that compels him love his wife?
Rather is he presumably her foe.
So, let him ponder long in this bad world
Ere do the simplest act of justice.

But
Again—and here we brush Bottini's breast—
Object you, "See the danger of delay!
"Suppose a man murdered my friend last month:
"Had I come up and killed him for his pains
"In rage, I had done right, allows the law:
"I meet him now and kill him in cold blood,
"I do wrong, equally allows the law:
"Wherein do actions differ, yours and mine?"
In plenitudine intellectus es?
Hast thy wits, Fisc? To take such slayer's life,
Returns it life to thy slain friend at all?
Had he stolen ring instead of stabbing friend,—
To-day, to-morrow or next century,
Meeting the thief, thy ring upon his thumb,
Thou justifiably hadst wrung it thence:
So, couldst thou wrench thy friend's life back again,
Though prisoned in the bosom of his foe.
Why, law would look complacent on thy wrath.
Our case is, that the thing we lost, we found:
The honour, we were robbed of eight months since,
Being recoverable at any day
By death of the delinquent. Go thy ways!
Ere thou hast learned law, will be much to do,
As said the gaby while he shod the goose.
Nay, if you urge me, interval was none!
From the inn to the villa—blank or else a bar
Of adverse and contrarious incident
Solid between us and our just revenge!
What with the priest who flourishes his blade,
The wife who like a fury flings at us,
The crowd—and then the capture, the appeal
To Rome, the journey there, the jaunting thence
To shelter at the House of Convertites,
The visits to the Villa, and so forth,
Where was one minute left us all this while
To put in execution that revenge
We planned o' the instant?—as it were, plumped down
O' the spot, some eight months since, which round sound egg,
Rome, more propitious than our nest, should hatch!
Object not, "You reached Rome on Christmas-eve,
"And, despite liberty to act at once,
"Waited a whole and indecorous week!"
Hath so the Molinism, the canker, lords,
Eaten to our bone? Is no religion left?
No care for aught held holy by the Church?
What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute
Secular business on a sacred day?
Should not the merest charity expect,
Setting our poor concerns aside for once,
We hurried to the song matutinal
I' the Sistine, and pressed forward for the Mass
The Cardinal that's Camerlengo[1] chaunts,
Then rushed on to the blessing of the Hat
And Rapier, which the Pope sends to what prince
Has done most detriment to the Infidel—
And thereby whetted courage if 'twere blunt?
Meantime, allow we kept the house a week,
Suppose not we were idle in our mew!
Picture us raging here and raving there—
"'Money?' I need none. 'Friends?' The word is null.
"Restore the white was on that shield of mine

[1] *Camerlengo:* the chamberlain of the Pope, who ranks highest among the cardinals, and presides during a vacancy in the Holy See.

"Borne at" . . . wherever might be shield to bear.
"I see my grandsire, he who fought so well
"At" . . . here find out and put in time and place,
Or else invent the fight his grandsire fought:
"I see this! I see that!"

(See nothing else,
Or I shall scarce see lamb's fry in an hour!
What to the uncle, as I bid advance
The smoking dish? "Fry suits a tender tooth!
"Behoves we care a little for our kin—
"You, Sir,—who care so much for cousinship
"As come to your poor loving nephew's feast!"
He has the reversion of a long lease yet—
Land to bequeath! He loves lamb's fry, I know!)

Here fall to be considered those same six
Qualities; what Bottini needs must call
So many aggravations of our crime,
Parasite-growth upon mere murder's back.
We summarily might dispose of such
By some off-hand and jaunty fling, some skit—
"So, since there's proved no crime to aggravate,
"A fico for your aggravations, Fisc!"
No,—handle mischief rather,—play with spells
Were meant to raise a spirit, and laugh the while
We show that did he rise we stand his match!
Therefore, first aggravation: we made up—
Over and above our simple murderous selves—
A regular assemblage of armed men,
Coadunatio armatorum,—ay,
Unluckily it was the very judge
That sits in judgment on our cause to-day
Who passed the law as Governor of Rome:
"Four men armed,"—though for lawful purpose, mark!
Much more for an acknowledged crime,—"shall die."
We five were armed to the teeth, meant murder too?
Why, that's the very point that saves us, Fisc!
Let me instruct you. Crime nor done nor meant,—
You punish still who arm and congregate:
For wherefore use bad means to a good end?
Crime being meant not done,—you punish still
The means to crime, whereon you haply pounce,
Though accident have baulked them of effect.
But crime not only compassed but complete,
Meant and done too? Why, since you have the end,
Be that your sole concern, nor mind those means
No longer to the purpose! Murdered we?
(—Which, that our luck was in the present case,
Quod contigisse in præsenti casu,
Is palpable, *manibus palpatum est*—)
Make murder out against us, nothing else!
Of many crimes committed with a view
To one main crime, Law overlooks the less,
Intent upon the large. Suppose a man
Having in view commission of a theft,
Climbs the town-wall: 'tis for the theft he hangs,
In case he stands convicted of such theft:
Law remits whipping, due to who clomb wall
Through bravery or wantonness alone,
Just to dislodge a daw's nest, plant a flag.
So I interpret you the manly mind
Of him about to judge both you and me,—
Our Governor, who, being no Fisc, my Fisc,
Cannot have blundered on ineptitude!
Next aggravation,—that the arms themselves
Were specially of such forbidden sort
Through shape or length or breadth, as, prompt, Law plucks
From single hand of solitary man,
Making him pay the carriage with his life:
Delatio armorum, arms against the rule,
Contra formam constitutionis, of
Pope Alexander's blessed memory.
Such are the poignards with the double prong,

Horn-like, when tines make bold the antlered buck,
Each prong of brittle glass—wherewith to stab
And break off short and so let fragment stick
Fast in the flesh to baffle surgery:
Such being the Genoese blade with hooked edge
That did us service at the villa here.
Sed parcat mihi tam eximius vir,
But,—let so rare a personage forgive,—
Fisc, thy objection is a foppery!
Thy charge runs that we killed three innocents:
Killed, dost see? Then, if killed, what matter how?
By stick or stone, by sword or dagger, tool
Long or tool short, round or triangular—
Poor slain folk find small comfort in the choice!
Means to an end, means to an end, my Fisc!
Nature cries out, "Take the first arms you find!"
Furor ministrat arma:[1] where's a stone?
Unde mî lapidem,[2] where darts for me?
Unde sagittas? But subdue the bard
And rationalize a little. Eight months since,
Had we, or had we not, incurred your blame
For letting 'scape unpunished this bad pair?
I think I proved that in last paragraph!
Why did we so? Because our courage failed.
Wherefore? Through lack of arms to fight the foe:
We had no arms or merely lawful ones,
An unimportant sword and blunderbuss,
Against a foe, pollent in potency,
The *amasius*, and our vixen of a wife.
Well then, how culpably do we gird loin
And once more undertake the high emprise,
Unless we load ourselves this second time
With handsome superfluity of arms,
Since better is "too much" than "not enough,"
And "*plus non vitiat*," too much does no harm,
Except in mathematics, sages say.

Gather instruction from the parable!
At first we are advised—"A lad hath here
"Seven barley loaves and two small fishes: what
"Is that among so many?" Aptly asked:
But put that question twice and, quite as apt,
The answer is "Fragments, twelve baskets full!"

And, while we speak of superabundance, fling
We word by the way to fools who cast their flout
On Guido—"Punishment were pardoned him,
"But here the punishment exceeds offence:
"He might be just, but he was cruel too!"
Why, grant there seems a kind of cruelty
In downright stabbing people he could maim,
(If so you stigmatize the stern and strict)
Still, Guido meant no cruelty—may plead
Transgression of his mandate, over-zeal
O' the part of his companions: all he craved
Was, they should fray the faces of the folk,
Merely disfigure, nowise make them die.
Solummodo fassus est, he owns no more,
Dedisse mandatum, than that he desired,
Ad sfrisiandum, dicam, that they hack
And hew, i' the customary phrase, his wife,
Uxorem tantum, and no harm beside.
If his instructions then be misconceived,
Nay, disobeyed, impute you blame to him?
Cite me no Panicollus to the point,
As adverse! Oh, I quite expect his case—
How certain noble youths of Sicily
Having good reason to mistrust their wives,
Killed them and were absolved in consequence:
While others who had gone beyond the need
By mutilation of each paramour—
As Galba in the Horatian satire[3] grieved
—These were condemned to the galleys, cast for guilt
Exceeding simple murder of a wife.
But why? Because of ugliness, and not
Cruelty, in the said revenge, I trow!
Ex causa abscissionis partium;

[1] *Furor arma ministrat:* Virgil, *Æn.* I. 150.
[2] *Unde mihi lapidem . . . unde sagittas:* Horace, *Sat.* II. 7, 116.
[3] *The Horatian satire: Sat.* I. 2, 46.

Qui nempe id facientes reputantur
Naturæ inimici, man revolts
Against them as the natural enemy.
Pray, grant to one who meant to slit the nose
And slash the cheek and slur the mouth, at most,
A somewhat more humane award than these
Obtained, these natural enemies of man!
Objectum funditus corruit, flat you fall,
My Fisc! I waste no kick on you, but pass.

Third aggravation: that our act was done—
Not in the public street, where safety lies,
Not in the bye-place, caution may avoid,
Wood, cavern, desert, spots contrived for crime,—
But in the very house, home, nook and nest,
O' the victims, murdered in their dwelling-place,
In domo ac habitatione propria,
Where all presumably is peace and joy.
The spider, crime, pronounce we twice a pest
When, creeping from congenial cottage, she
Taketh hold with her hands, to horrify
His household more, i' the palace of the king.
All three were housed and safe and confident.
Moreover, the permission that our wife
Should have at length *domum pro carcere*,
Her own abode in place of prison—why,
We ourselves granted, by our other self
And proxy Paolo: did we make such grant,
Meaning a lure?—elude the vigilance
O' the jailor, lead her to commodious death,
While we ostensibly relented? Ay,
Just so did we, nor otherwise, my Fisc!
Is vengeance lawful? We demand our right,
But find it will be questioned or refused
By jailor, turnkey, hangdog,—what know we?
Pray, how is it we should conduct ourselves?
To gain our private right—break public peace,
Do you bid us?—trouble order with our broils?
Endanger . . shall I shrink to own . . ourselves?—
Who want no broken head nor bloody nose
(While busied slitting noses, breaking heads)
From the first tipstaff that may interfere!
Nam quicquid sit, for howsoever it be,
An de consensu nostro, if with leave
Or not, *a monasterio*, from the nuns,
Educta esset, she had been led forth,
Potuimus id dissimulare, we
May well have granted leave in pure pretence,
Ut aditum habere, that thereby
An entry we might compass, a free move
Potuissemus, to her easy death,
Ad eam occidendam. Privacy
O' the hearth, and sanctitude of home, say you?
Shall we give man's abode more privilege
Than God's?—for in the churches where He dwells,
In quibus assistit Regum Rex, by means
Of His essence, *per essentiam*, all the same,
Et nihilominus, therein, *in eis*,
Ex justa via delinquens, whoso dares
To take a liberty on ground enough,
Is pardoned, *excusatur*: that's our case—
Delinquent through befitting cause. You hold,
To punish a false wife in her own house
Is graver than, what happens every day,
To hale a debtor from his hiding-place
In church protected by the Sacrament?
To this conclusion have I brought my Fisc?
Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests;
Praise you the impiety that follows, Fisc?
Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head?
"*Contra Fiscum definitum est!*" He's done!
"*Surge et scribe*," make a note of it!
—If I may dally with Aquinas' word.

Or in the death-throe does he mutter still,
Fourth aggravation, that we changed our garb,
And rusticized ourselves with uncouth hat,
Rough vest and goatskin wrappage; murdered thus
Mutatione vestium, in disguise,

Whereby mere murder got complexed with wile,
Turned *homicidium ex insidiis?* Fisc,
How often must I round thee in the ears—
All means are lawful to a lawful end?
Concede he had the right to kill his wife:
The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
De illa ut vindictam sumeret,
That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
Commodius, with more ease, *et tutius*,
And safelier: wants he warrant for the step?
Read to thy profit how the Apostle once
For ease and safety, when Damascus raged,
Was let down in a basket by the wall
To 'scape the malice of the governor
(Another sort of Governor boasts Rome!)
—Many are of opinion,—covered close,
Concealed with — what except that very cloak
He left behind at Troas afterward?
I shall not add a syllable: Molinists may!
Well, have we more to manage? Ay, indeed!
Fifth aggravation, that our wife reposed
Sub potestate judicis, beneath
Protection of the judge,—her house was styled
A prison, and his power became its guard
In lieu of wall and gate and bolt and bar.
This is a tough point, shrewd, redoubtable:
Because we have to supplicate that judge
Shall overlook wrong done the judgment-seat.
Now, I might suffer my own nose be pulled,
As man: but then as father . . . if the Fisc
Touched one hair of my boy who held my hand
In confidence he could not come to harm
Crossing the Corso, at my own desire,
Going to see those bodies in the church—
What would you say to that, Don Hyacinth?
This is the sole and single knotty point:
For, bid Tommati blink his interest,
You laud his magnanimity the while
But baulk Tommati's office,—he talks big!
"My predecessors in the place,—those sons
"O' the prophets that may hope succeed me here,—
"Shall I diminish their prerogative?
"Count Guido Franceschini's honour!—well,
"Has the Governor of Rome none?"

You perceive,
The cards are all against us. Make a push,
Kick over table, as shrewd gamesters do!
We, do you say, encroach upon the rights,
Deny the omnipotence o' the Judge forsooth?
We, who have only been from first to last
Intending that his purpose should prevail,
Nay more, at times, anticipating it
At risk of his rebuke?

But wait awhile!
Cannot we lump this with the sixth and last
Of the aggravations—that the Majesty
O' the Sovereign here received a wound? to-wit,
Læsa Majestas, since our violence
Was out of envy to the course of law,
In odium litis? We cut short thereby
Three pending suits, promoted by ourselves
I' the main,—which worsens crime, *accedit ad Exasperationem criminis!*

Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect!
How, did not indignation chain my tongue,
Could I repel this last, worst charge of all!
(There is a porcupine to barbacue;
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips; but, good Lord,
Suppose the devil instigate the wench
To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
Come, I must go myself and see to things:
I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)
Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred within,
And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
Fall under such a censure, we?—who yearned
So much that Majesty dispel the cloud
And shine on us with healing on her wings,
That we prayed Pope *Majestas*' very self
To anticipate a little the tardy pack,
Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay
Should start the beagles into sudden yelp
Unisonous,—and, Gospel leading Law,
Grant there assemble in our own behoof
A Congregation, a particular Court,

A few picked friends of quality and place,
To hear the several matters in dispute,—
Causes big, little and indifferent,
Bred of our marriage like a mushroom-growth,—
All at once (can one brush off such too soon?)
And so with laudable despatch decide
Whether we, in the main (to sink detail)
Were one the Pope should hold fast or let go.
"What, take the credit from the Law?" you ask?
Indeed, we did! Law ducks to Gospel here:
Why should Law gain the glory and pronounce
A judgment shall immortalize the Pope?
Yes: our self-abnegating policy
Was Joab's—we would rouse our David's sloth,
Bid him encamp against a city, sack
A place whereto ourselves had long laid siege,
Lest, taking it at last, it take our name
Nor be styled *Innocentinopolis*.
But no! The modesty was in alarm,
The temperance refused to interfere,
Returned us our petition with the word
"*Ad judices suos*," "Leave him to his Judge!"
As who should say "Why trouble my repose?
"Why consult Peter in a simple case,
"Peter's wife's sister in her fever-fit
"Might solve as readily as the Apostle's self?
"Are my Tribunals posed by aught so plain?
"Hath not my Court a conscience? It is of age,
"Ask it!"

We do ask,—but, inspire reply
To the Court thou bidst me ask, as I have asked—
Oh thou, who vigilantly dost attend
To even the few, the ineffectual words
Which rise from this our low and mundane sphere
Up to thy region out of smoke and noise,
Seeking corroboration from thy nod
Who art all justice—which means mercy too,
In a low noisy smoky world like ours
Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed!
We venerate the father of the flock,
Whose last faint sands of life, the frittered gold,
Fall noiselessly, yet all too fast, o' the cone
And tapering heap of those collected years:
Never have these been hurried in their flow,
Though justice fain would jog reluctant arm,
In eagerness to take the forfeiture
Of guilty life: much less shall mercy sue
In vain that thou let innocence survive,
Precipitate no minim of the mass
O' the all-so precious moments of thy life,
By pushing Guido into death and doom!

(Our Cardinal engages to go read
The Pope my speech, and point its beauties out.
They say, the Pope has one half-hour, in twelve,
Of something like a moderate return
Of the intellectuals,—never much to lose!
If I adroitly plant this passage there,
The Fisc will find himself forestalled, I think,
Though he stand, beat till the old ear-drum break!
—Ah, boy of my own bowels, Hyacinth,
Wilt ever catch the knack, requite the pains
Of poor papa, become proficient too
I' the how and why and when, the time to laugh,
The time to weep, the time, again, to pray,
And all the times prescribed by Holy Writ?
Well, well, we fathers can but care, but cast
Our bread upon the waters!)
In a word,
These secondary charges go to ground,
Since secondary, and superfluous,—motes
Quite from the main point: we did all and some,
Little and much, adjunct and principal,
Causa honoris. Is there such a cause
As the sake of honour? By that sole test try
Our action, nor demand if more or less,
Because of the action's mode, we merit blame
Or may-be deserve praise! The Court decides.
Is the end lawful? It allows the means:
What we may do, we may with safety do,
And what means "safety" we ourselves must judge.
Put case a person wrongs me past dispute:
If my legitimate vengeance be a blow,
Mistrusting my bare arm can deal that blow,

I claim co-operation of a stick;
Doubtful if stick be tough, I crave a sword;
Diffident of ability in fence,
I fee a friend, a swordsman to assist:
Take one—he may be coward, fool or knave:
Why not take fifty?—and if these exceed
I' the due degree of drubbing, whom accuse
But the first author of the aforesaid wrong
Who put poor me to such a world of pains?
Surgery would have just excised a wart;
The patient made such pother, struggled so
That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all.
Taunt us not that our friends performed for pay!
Ourselves had toiled for simple honour's sake:
But country clowns want dirt they comprehend,
The piece of gold! Our reasons, which suffice
Ourselves, be ours alone; our piece of gold
Be, to the rustic, reason he approves!
We must translate our motives like our speech,
Into the lower phrase that suits the sense
O' the limitedly apprehensive. Let
Each level have its language! Heaven speaks first
To the angel, then the angel tames the word
Down to the ear of Tobit: he, in turn,
Diminishes the message to his dog,
And finally that dog finds how the flea
(Which else, importunate, might check his speed)
Shall learn its hunger must have holiday.
By application of his tongue or paw:
So many varied sorts of language here,
Each following each with pace to match the step,
Haud passibus æquis!

Talking of which flea,
Reminds me I must put in special word
For the poor humble following,—the four friends,
Sicarii, our assassins caught and caged.
Ourselves are safe in your approval now:
Yet must we care for our companions, plead
The cause o' the poor, the friends (of old-world faith)
Who lie in tribulation for our sake.
Pauperum Procurator is my style:
I stand forth as the poor man's advocate:
And when we treat of what concerns the poor,
Et cum agatur de pauperibus,
In bondage, *carceratis*, for their sake,
In eorum causis, natural piety,
Pietas, ever ought to win the day,
Triumphare debet, quia ipsi sunt,
Because those very paupers constitute,
Thesaurus Christi, all the wealth of Christ.
Nevertheless I shall not hold you long
With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn
Candle at noon-tide, clarify the clear.
There beams a case refulgent from our books—
Castrensis, Butringarius,[1] everywhere
I find it burn to dissipate the dark.
'Tis this: a husband had a friend, which friend
Seemed to him over-friendly with his wife
In thought and purpose,—I pretend no more.
To justify suspicion or dispel,
He bids his wife make show of giving heed,
Semblance of sympathy—propose, in fine,
A secret meeting in a private place.
The friend, enticed thus, finds an ambuscade,
To-wit, the husband posted with a pack
Of other friends, who fall upon the first
And beat his love and life out both at once.
These friends were brought to question for their help;
Law ruled "The husband being in the right,
"Who helped him in the right can scarce be wrong"—
Opinio, an opinion every way,
Multum tenenda cordi, heart should hold!
When the inferiors follow as befits
The lead o' the principal, they change their name,
And, *non dicuntur*, are no longer called
His mandatories, *mandatorii*,
But helpmates, *sed auxiliatores;* since
To that degree does honour's sake lend aid,
Adeo honoris causa est efficax,
That not alone, *non solum*, does it pour
Itself out, *se diffundat*, on mere friends
We bring to do our bidding of this sort,

[1] *Castrensis, Butringarius:* Paulus de Castro and Jacobus Butrigarius (as the name should be spelt), jurists of the sixteenth century.

In mandatorios simplices, but sucks
Along with it in wide and generous whirl,
Sed etiam assassinii qualitate
Qualificatos, people qualified
By the quality of assassination's self,
Dare I make use of such neologism,
Ut utar verbo.

Haste we to conclude.
Of the other points that favour, leave some few
For Spreti; such as the delinquents' youth.
One of them falls short, by some months, of age
Fit to be managed by the gallows; two
May plead exemption from our law's award,
Being foreigners, subjects of the Granduke—
I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve
Myself the juicier breast of argument—
Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc,
Who furnished me the tid-bit: he must needs
Play off his privilege and rack the clowns,—
And they, at instance of the rack, confess
All four unanimously made resolve,—
The night o' the murder, in brief minute snatched
Behind the back of Guido as he fled,—
That, since he had not kept his promise, paid
The money for the murder on the spot,
So, reaching home again, might please ignore
The pact or pay them in improper coin,—
They one and all resolved, these hopeful friends,
'Twere best inaugurate the morrow's light,
Nature recruited with her due repose,
By killing Guido as he lay asleep
Pillowed on wallet which contained their fee.

I thank the Fisc for knowledge of this fact:
What fact could hope to make more manifest
Their rectitude, Guido's integrity?
For who fails recognize the touching truth
That these poor rustics bore no envy, hate,
Malice nor yet uncharitableness
Against the people they had put to death?
In them, did such an act reward itself?
All done was to deserve the simple pay,
Obtain the bread clowns earn by sweat of brow,
And missing which, they missed of everything—
Hence claimed pay, even at expense of life
To their own lord, so little warped (admire!)
By prepossession, such the absolute
Instinct of equity in rustic souls!
Whereas our Count, the cultivated mind,
He, wholly rapt in his serene regard
Of honour, he contemplating the sun
Who hardly marks if taper blink below,—
He, dreaming of no argument for death
Except a vengeance worthy noble hearts,—
Dared not so desecrate the deed, forsooth,
Vulgarize vengeance, as defray its cost
By money dug from out the dirty earth,
Irritant mere, in Ovid's phrase, to ill.
What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope,—
The only motive they could masticate,
Milk for babes, not strong meat which men require?
The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled enough,
He spared them the pollution of the pay.
So much for the allegement, thine, my Fisc,
Quo nil absurdius, than which nought more mad,
Excogitari potest, may be squeezed
From out the cogitative brain of thee!
And now, thou excellent the Governor!
(Push to the peroration) *cæterum*
Enixe supplico, I strive in prayer,
Ut dominis meis, that unto the Court,
Benigna fronte, with a gracious brow,
Et oculis serenis, and mild eyes,
Perpendere placeat, it may please them weigh,
Quod dominus Guido, that our noble Count,
Occidit, did the killing in dispute,
Ut ejus honor tumulatus, that
The honour of him buried fathom-deep
In infamy, *in infamia*, might arise,
Resurgeret, as ghost breaks sepulchre!
Occidit, for he killed, *uxorem*, wife,
Quia illi juit, since she was to him,
Opprobrio, a disgrace and nothing more!
Et genitores, killed her parents too,

Qui, who, *postposita verecundia*,
Having thrown off all sort of decency,
Filiam repudiarunt, had renounced
Their daughter, *atque declarare non*
Erubuerunt, nor felt blush tinge cheek,
Declaring, *meretricis genitam*
Esse, she was the offspring of a drab,
Ut ipse dehonestaretur, just
That so himself might lose his social rank !
Cujus mentem, and which daughter's heart and soul,
They, *perverterunt*, turned from the right course,
Et ad illicitos amores non
Dumtaxat pellexerunt, and to love
Not simply did alluringly incite,
Sed vi obedientiæ, but by force
O' the duty, *filialis*, daughters owe,
Coegerunt, forced and drove her to the deed :
Occidit, I repeat he killed the clan,
Ne scilicet amplius in dedecore,
Lest peradventure longer life might trail,
Viveret, link by link his turpitude,
Invisus consanguineis, hateful so
To kith and kindred, *a nobilibus*
Notatus, shunned by men of quality,
Relictus ab amicis, left i' the lurch
By friends, *ab omnibus derisus*, turned
A common hack-block to try edge of jokes.
Occidit, and he killed them here in Rome,
In Urbe, the Eternal City, Sirs,
Nempe quæ alias spectata est,
The appropriate theatre which witnessed once,
Matronam nobilem, Lucretia's self,
Abluere pudicitiæ maculas,
Wash off the spots of her pudicity,
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood ;
Quæ vidit, and which city also saw,
Patrem, Virginius, *undequaque*, quite,
Impunem, with no sort of punishment,
Nor, *et non illaudatum*, lacking praise,
Sed polluentem parricidio,
Imbrue his hands with butchery, *filiæ*,
Of chaste Virginia, to avoid a rape,
Ne raperetur ad stupra ; so to heart,
Tanti illi cordi fuit, did he take,
Suspicio, the mere fancy men might have,
Honoris amittendi, of fame's loss,
Ut potius voluerit filia
Orbari, he preferred to lose his child,
Quam illa incederet, rather than she walk
The ways an, *inhonesta*, child disgraced,
Licet non sponte, though against her will.
Occidit—killed them, I reiterate—
In propria domo, in their own abode,
Ut adultera et parentes, that each wretch,
Conscii agnoscerent, might both see and say,
Nullum locum, there's no place, *nullumque esse*
Asylum, nor yet refuge of escape,
Impenetrabilem, shall serve as bar,
Honori læso, to the wounded one
In honour ; *neve ibi opprobria*
Continuarentur, killed them on the spot,
Moreover, dreading lest within those walls
The opprobrium peradventure be prolonged,
Et domus quæ testis fuit turpium,
And that the domicile which witnessed crime,
Esset et pœnæ, might watch punishment :
Occidit, killed, I round you in the ears,
Quia alio modo, since by other mode,
Non poterat ejus existimatio,
There was no possibility his fame,
Læsa, gashed griesly, *tam enormiter*,
Ducere cicatrices, might be healed :
Occidit ut exemplum præberet
Uxoribus, killed her, so to lesson wives
Jura conjugii, that the marriage-oath,
Esse servanda, must be kept henceforth :
Occidit denique, killed her, in a word,
Ut pro posse honestus viveret,
That he, please God, might creditably live,
Sin minus, but if fate willed otherwise,
Proprii honoris, of his outraged fame,
Offensi, by Mannaia, if you please,
Commiseranda victima caderet,
The pitiable victim he should fall !

Done ! I' the rough, i' the rough ! But done ! And, lo,
Landed and stranded lies my very speech,
My miracle, my monster of defence—
Leviathan into the nose whereof
I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn,

And given him to my maidens for a play!
I' the rough: to-morrow I review my piece,
Tame here and there undue floridity.
It's hard: you have to plead before these priests
And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass
For heathen and, what's worse, for ignorant
O' the quality o' the Court and what it likes
By way of illustration of the law.
To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,
And, having first ecclesiasticized,
Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
Giving my Fisc his finish. There's my speech!
And where's my fry, and family and friends?
Where's that huge Hyacinth I mean to hug
Till he cries out, "*Jam satis!* Let me breathe!"
Now, what an evening have I earned to-day!
Hail, ye true pleasures, all the rest are false!
Oh the old mother, oh the fattish wife!
Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque,
And wrap himself around with mamma's veil
Done up to imitate papa's black robe,
(I'm in the secret of the comedy,—
Part of the program leaked out long ago!)
And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor,
Mimic Don father that defends the Count:
And for reward shall have a small full glass
Of manly red rosolio to himself,
—Always provided that he conjugate
Bibo, I drink, correctly—nor be found
Make the *perfectum*, *bipsi*, as last year!
How the ambitious do so harden heart
As lightly hold by these home-sanctitudes,
To me is matter of bewilderment—
Bewilderment! Because ambition's range
Is nowise tethered by domestic tie.
Am I refused an outlet from my home
To the world's stage? — whereon a man should play
The man in public, vigilant for law,
Zealous for truth, a credit to his kind,
Nay,—since, employing talent so, I yield
The Lord His own again with usury,—
A satisfaction, yea, to God Himself!
Well, I have modelled me by Agur's wish,
"Remove far from me vanity and lies,
"Feed me with food convenient for me!" What
I' the world should a wise man require beyond?
Can I but coax the good fat little wife
To tell her fool of a father the mad prank
His scapegrace nephew played this time last year
At Carnival! He could not choose, I think,
But modify that inconsiderate gift
O' the cup and cover (somewhere in the will
Under the pillow, someone seems to guess)
—Correct that clause in favour of a boy
The trifle ought to grace, with name engraved,
Would look so well, produced in future years
To pledge a memory, when poor papa
Latin and law are long since laid at rest—
Hyacintho dono dedit avus! Why,
The wife should get a necklace for her pains,
The very pearls that made Violante proud,
And Pietro pawned for half their value once,—
Redeemable by somebody, *ne sit*
Marita quæ rotundioribus
Onusta mammis . . . baccis ambulet:
Her bosom shall display the big round balls,
No braver proudly borne by wedded wife!
With which Horatian promise[1] I conclude.

Into the pigeon-hole with thee, my speech!
Off and away, first work then play, play, play!
Bottini, burn thy books, thou blazing ass!
Sing "Tra-la-la, for, lambkins, we must live!"

IX.—JURIS DOCTOR JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS,

FISCI ET REV. CAM. APOSTOL. ADVOCATUS.

Had I God's leave, how I would alter things!
If I might read instead of print my speech,—
Ay, and enliven speech with many a flower
Refuses obstinate to blow in print,
As wildings planted in a prim parterre,—

[1] *Horatian promise:* Horace, *Epodes*, 8, 13.

This scurvy room were turned an immense hall;
Opposite, fifty judges in a row;
This side and that of me, for audience—Rome:
And, where yon window is, the Pope should hide—
Watch, curtained, but peep visibly enough.
A buzz of expectation! Through the crowd,
Jingling his chain and stumping with his staff,
Up comes an usher, louts him low, "The Court
"Requires the allocution of the Fisc!"
I rise, I bend, I look about me, pause
O'er the hushed multitude: I count—One, two——

Have ye seen, Judges, have ye, lights of law,—
When it may hap some painter, much in vogue
Throughout our city nutritive of arts,
Ye summon to a task shall test his worth,
To manufacture, as he knows and can,
A work may decorate a palace-wall,
Afford my lords their Holy Family,—
Hath it escaped the acumen of the Court
How such a painter sets himself to paint?
Suppose that Joseph, Mary and her Babe
A-journeying to Egypt, prove the piece:
Why, first he sedulously practiseth,
This painter,—girding loin and lighting lamp,—
On what may nourish eye, make facile hand;
Getteth him studies (styled by draughtsmen so)
From some assistant corpse of Jew or Turk
Or, haply, Molinist, he cuts and carves,—
This Luca or this Carlo or the like.
To him the bones their inmost secret yield,
Each notch and nodule signify their use:
On him the muscles turn, in triple tier,
And pleasantly entreat the entrusted man
"Familiarize thee with our play that lifts
"Thus, and thus lowers again, leg, arm and foot!"
—Ensuring due correctness in the nude.
Which done, is all done? Not a whit, ye know!
He,—to art's surface rising from her depth,—
If some flax-polled soft-bearded sire be found,
May simulate a Joseph, (happy chance!)—
Limneth exact each wrinkle of the brow,
Loseth no involution, cheek or chap,
Till lo, in black and white, the senior lives!
Is it a young and comely peasant-nurse
That poseth? (be the phrase accorded me!)
Each feminine delight of florid lip,
Eyes brimming o'er and brow bowed down with love,
Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous,—
Glad on the paper in a trice they go
To help his notion of the Mother-maid:
Methinks I see it, chalk a little stumped!
Yea and her babe—that flexure of soft limbs,
That budding face imbued with dewy sleep,
Contribute each an excellence to Christ.
Nay, since he humbly lent companionship,
Even the poor ass, unpanniered and elate
Stands, perks an ear up, he a model too;
While clouted shoon, staff, scrip and water-gourd,—
Aught may betoken travel, heat and haste,—
No jot nor tittle of these but in its turn
Ministers to perfection of the piece:
Till now, such piece before him, part by part,—
Such prelude ended,—pause our painter may,
Submit his fifty studies one by one,
And in some sort boast "I have served my lords."

But what? And hath he painted once this while?
Or when ye cry "Produce the thing required,
"Show us our picture shall rejoice its niche,
"Thy Journey through the Desert done in oils!"—
What, doth he fall to shuffling 'mid his sheets,
Fumbling for first this, then the other fact
Consigned to paper,—"studies," bear the term!—
And stretch a canvas, mix a pot of paste,
And fasten here a head and there a tail,
(The ass hath one, my Judges!) so dove-tail

Or, rather, ass-tail in, piece sorrily out—
By bits of reproduction of the life—
The picture, the expected Family?
I trow not! do I miss with my conceit
The mark, my lords?—not so my lords were served!
Rather your artist turns abrupt from these,
And preferably buries him and broods
(Quite away from aught vulgar and extern)
On the inner spectrum, filtered through the eye,
His brain-deposit, bred of many a drop,
E pluribus unum:[1] and the wiser he!
For in that brain,—their fancy sees at work,
Could my lords peep indulged,—results alone,
Not processes which nourish such results,
Would they discover and appreciate,—life
Fed by digestion, not raw food itself,
No gobbets but smooth comfortable chyme[2]
Secreted from each snapped-up crudity,—
Less distinct, part by part, but in the whole
Truer to the subject,—the main central truth
And soul o' the picture, would my Judges spy,—
Not those mere fragmentary studied facts
Which answer to the outward frame and flesh—
Not this nose, not that eyebrow, the other fact
Of man's staff, woman's stole or infant's clout,
But lo, a spirit-birth conceived of flesh,
Truth rare and real, not transcripts, fact and false.
The studies—for his pupils and himself!
The picture be for our eximious Rome
And—who knows?—satisfy its Governor,
Whose new wing to the villa he hath bought
(God give him joy of it) by Capena, soon
('Tis bruited) shall be glowing with the brush
Of who hath long surpassed the Florentine,[3]
The Urbinate[4] and . . . what if I dared add,

[1] *E pluribus unum:* "one made out of many" (Virgil, *Moretum*, 103).

[2] *Chyme:* the matter into which food is reduced by the juices of the stomach.

[3] *The Florentine:* Michel Angelo.

[4] *The Urbinate:* Rafael.

Even his master, yea the Cortonese,[5]—
I mean the accomplished Ciro Ferri,[6] Sirs!
(—Did not he die? I'll see before I print.)

End we exordium, Phœbus plucks my ear!
Thus then, just so and no whit otherwise,
Have I,—engaged as I were Ciro's self,
To paint a parallel, a Family,
The patriarch Pietro with his wise old wife
To boot (as if one introduced Saint Anne
By bold conjecture to complete the group)
And juvenile Pompilia with her babe,
Who, seeking safety in the wilderness,
Were all surprised by Herod, while outstretched
In sleep beneath a palm-tree by a spring,
And killed—the very circumstance I paint,
Moving the pity and terror of my lords—
Exactly so have I, a month at least,
Your Fiscal, made me cognizant of facts,
Searched out, pried into, pressed the meaning forth
Of every piece of evidence in point,
How bloody Herod slew these innocents,—
Until the glad result is gained, the group
Demonstrably presented in detail,
Their slumber and his onslaught,—like as life.
Yea and, availing me of help allowed
By law, discreet provision lest my lords
Be too much troubled by effrontery,—
The rack, law plies suspected crime withal—
(Law that hath listened while the lyrist sang
"*Lene tormentum ingenio admoves,*"
Gently thou joggest by a twinge the wit,
"*Plerumque duro,*" else were slow to blab!)
Through this concession my full cup runs o'er:
The guilty owns his guilt without reserve.
Therefore by part and part I clutch my case
Which, in entirety now,—momentous task,—
My lords demand, so render them I must,
Since, one poor pleading more and I have done.
But shall I ply my papers, play my proofs,

[5] *The Cortonese:* Pietro da Cortona.

[6] *Ciro Ferri:* a painter, who lived 1634–1689, a pupil of Pietro da Cortona. He had now been dead some nine years.

Parade my studies, fifty in a row,
As though the Court were yet in pupilage,
Claimed not the artist's ultimate appeal?
Much rather let me soar the height prescribed
And, bowing low, proffer my picture's self!
No more of proof, disproof,—such virtue was,
Such vice was never in Pompilia, now!
Far better say "Behold Pompilia!"—(for
I leave the family as unmanageable,
And stick to just one portrait, but life-size.)
Hath calumny imputed to the fair
A blemish, mole on cheek or wart on chin,
Much more, blind hidden horrors best unnamed?
Shall I descend to prove you, point by point,
Never was knock-knee known nor splay-foot found
In Phryne? (I must let the portrait go,
Content me with the model, I believe)—
—I prove this? An indignant sweep of hand,
Dash at and doing away with drapery,
And,—use your eyes, Athenians, smooth she smiles![1]
Or,—since my client can no longer smile,
And more appropriate instances abound,—
What is this Tale of Tarquin, how the slave
Was caught by him, preferred to Collatine?
Thou, even from thy corpse-clothes virginal,
Look'st the lie dead, Lucretia! Thus at least
I, by the guidance of antiquity,
(Our one infallible guide) now operate,
Sure that the innocence thus shown is safe;
Sure, too, that, while I plead, the echoes cry
(Lend my weak voice thy trump, sonorous Fame!)
"Monstrosity the Phrynean shape shall mar,
"Lucretia's soul comport with Tarquin's lie,
"When thistles grow on vines or thorns yield figs,
"Or oblique sentence leave this judgment-seat!"

[1] Alluding to the defence of the courtesan Phryné by Hyperides, who secured a verdict by displaying her unveiled beauty to the court.

A great theme: may my strength be adequate!
For—paint Pompilia, dares my feebleness?
How did I unaware engage so much
—Find myself undertaking to produce
A faultless nature in a flawless form?
What's here? Oh, turn aside nor dare the blaze
Of such a crown, such constellation, say,
As jewels here thy front, Humanity!
First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl;
Then childhood—stone which, dew-drop at the first,
(An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze,
Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so:
Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,
Womanliness and wifehood opaline,
Its milk-white pallor,—chastity,—suffused
With here and there a tint and hint of flame,—
Desire,—the lapidary loves to find.
Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,
Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife
Crown the ideal in our earth at last!
What should a faculty like mine do here?
Close eyes, or else, the rashlier hurry hand!

Which is to say,—lose no time but begin!
Sermocinando ne declamem, Sirs,
Ultra clepsydram, as our preachers smile,
Lest I exceed my hour-glass. Whereupon,
As Flaccus prompts, I dare the epic plunge—
Begin at once with marriage, up till when
Little or nothing would arrest your love,
In the easeful life o' the lady; lamb and lamb,
How do they differ? Know one, you know all
Manners of maidenhood: mere maiden she.
And since all lambs are like in more than fleece,
Prepare to find that, lamb-like, she too frisks—
O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex!
To whom, the Teian[2] teaches us, for gift,
Not strength,—man's dower,—but beauty, nature gave,
"Beauty in lieu of spears, in lieu of shields!"
And what is beauty's sure concomitant,
Nay, intimate essential character,

[2] *The Teian:* Anacreon.

But melting wiles, deliciousest deceits,
The whole redoubted armoury of love?
Therefore of vernal pranks, dishevellings
O' the hair of youth that dances April in,
And easily-imagined Hebe-slips
O'er sward which May makes over-smooth for foot—
These shall we pry into?—or wiselier wink,
Though numerous and dear they may have been?

For lo, advancing Hymen and his pomp!
Discedunt nunc amores, loves, farewell!
Maneat amor, let love, the sole, remain!
Farewell to dewiness and prime of life!
Remains the rough determined day: dance done,
To work, with plough and harrow! What comes next?
'Tis Guido henceforth guides Pompilia's step,
Cries "No more friskings o'er the foodful glebe,
"Else, 'ware the whip!" Accordingly,—first crack
O' the thong,—we hear that his young wife was barred,
Cohibita fuit, from the old free life,
Vitam liberiorem ducere.
Demur we? Nowise: heifer brave the hind?
We seek not there should lapse the natural law,
The proper piety to lord and king
And husband: let the heifer bear the yoke!
Only, I crave he cast not patience off,
This hind; for deem you she endures the whip,
Nor winces at the goad, nay, restive, kicks?
What if the adversary's charge be just,
And all untowardly she pursue her way
With groan and grunt, though hind strike ne'er so hard?
If petulant remonstrance made appeal,
Unseasonable, o'erprotracted,—if
Importunate challenge taxed the public ear
When silence more decorously had served
For protestation,—if Pompilian plaint
Wrought but to aggravate Guidonian ire,—
Why, such mishaps, ungainly though they be,
Ever companion change, are incident
To altered modes and novelty of life:
The philosophic mind expects no less,
Smilingly knows and names the crisis, sits
Waiting till old things go and new arrive.
Therefore, I hold a husband but inept
Who turns impatient at such transit-time,
As if this running from the rod would last!

Since, even while I speak, the end is reached:
Success awaits the soon-disheartened man.
The parents turn their backs and leave the house,
The wife may wail but none shall intervene:
He hath attained his object, groom and bride
Partake the nuptial bower no soul can see,
Old things are passed and all again is new,
Over and gone the obstacles to peace,
Novorum—tenderly the Mantuan[1] turns
The expression, some such purpose in his eye—
Nascitur ordo! Every storm is laid,
And forth from plain each pleasant herb may peep,
Each bloom of wifehood in abeyance late:
(Confer a passage in the Canticles.)

But what if, as 'tis wont with plant and wife,
Flowers,—after a suppression to good end,
Still, when they do spring forth,—sprout here, spread there,
Anywhere likelier than beneath the foot
O' the lawful good-man gardener of the ground?
He dug and dibbled, sowed and watered,—still
'Tis a chance wayfarer shall pluck the increase.
Just so, respecting persons not too much,
The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm
And proper floweret of feminity
To whosoever had a nose to smell
Or breast to deck: what if the charge be true?
The fault were graver had she looked with choice,
Fastidiously appointed who should grasp,
Who, in the whole town, go without the prize!

[1] *The Mantuan:* Virgil, *Ecl.* 4, 5—*Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.*

To nobody she destined donative,
But, first come was first served, the accuser saith.
Put case her sort of . . . in this kind . . . escapes
Were many and oft and indiscriminate—
Impute ye as the action were prepense,
The gift particular, arguing malice so?
Which butterfly of the wide air shall brag
"I was preferred to Guido"—when 'tis clear
The cup, he quaffs at, lay with olent[1] breast
Open to gnat, midge, bee and moth as well?
One chalice entertained the company;
And if its peevish lord object the more,
Mistake, misname such bounty in a wife,
Haste we to advertise him—charm of cheek,
Lustre of eye, allowance of the lip,
All womanly components in a spouse,
These are no household-bread each stranger's bite
Leaves by so much diminished for the mouth
O' the master of the house at supper-time:
But rather like a lump of spice they lie,
Morsel of myrrh, which scents the neighbourhood
Yet greets its lord no lighter by a grain.

Nay, even so, he shall be satisfied!
Concede we there was reason in his wrong,
Grant we his grievance and content the man!
For lo, Pompilia, she submits herself;
Ere three revolving years have crowned their course,
Off and away she puts this same reproach
Of lavish bounty, inconsiderate gift
O' the sweets of wifehood stored to other ends:
No longer shall he blame "She none excludes,"
But substitute "She laudably sees all,
"Searches the best out and selects the same."
For who is here, long sought and latest found,
Waiting his turn unmoved amid the whirl,
"*Constans in levitate*,"—Ha, my lords?
Calm in his levity,—indulge the quip!—
Since 'tis a levite bears the bell away,
Parades him henceforth as Pompilia's choice.
'Tis no ignoble object, husband! Doubt'st?

When here comes tripping Flaccus[2] with his phrase
"Trust me, no miscreant singled from the mob,
"*Crede non illum tibi de scelesta*
"*Plebe delectum*," but a man of mark,
A priest, dost hear? Why then, submit thyself!
Priest, ay and very phœnix of such fowl,
Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous,
Comely too, since precise the precept points—
On the selected levite be there found
Nor mole nor scar nor blemish, lest the mind
Come all uncandid through the thwarting flesh!
Was not the son of Jesse ruddy, sleek,
Pleasant to look on, pleasant every way?
Since well he smote the harp and sweetly sang,
And danced till Abigail came out to see,
And seeing smiled and smiling ministered
The raisin-cluster and the cake of figs,
With ready meal refreshed the gifted youth,
Till Nabal, who was absent shearing sheep,
Felt heart sink, took to bed (discreetly done—
They might have been beforehand with him else)
And died—would Guido have behaved as well!
But ah, the faith of early days is gone,
Heu prisca fides! Nothing died in him
Save courtesy, good sense and proper trust,
Which, when they ebb from souls they should o'erflow,
Discover stub, weed, sludge and ugliness.
(The Pope, we know, is Neapolitan
And relishes a sea-side simile.)
Deserted by each charitable wave,
Guido, left high and dry, shows jealous now!
Jealous avouched, paraded: tax the fool
With any peccadillo, he responds
"Truly I beat my wife through jealousy,
"Imprisoned her and punished otherwise,
"Being jealous: now would threaten, sword in hand,
"Now manage to mix poison in her sight,
"And so forth: jealously I dealt, in fine."
Concede thus much, and what remains to prove?
Have I to teach my masters what effect

[1] *Olent:* odorous.

[2] *Flaccus:* Horace, *Odes*, II. 4, 17.

Hath jealousy, and how, befooling men,
It makes false true, abuses eye and ear,
Turns mere mist adamantine, loads with sound
Silence, and into void and vacancy
Crowds a whole phalanx of conspiring foes?
Therefore who owns "I watched with jealousy
"My wife," adds "for no reason in the world!"
What need that, thus proved madman, he remark
"The thing I thought a serpent proved an eel"?—
Perchance the right Comacchian, six foot length,
And not an inch too long for that rare pie
(Master Arcangeli has heard of such)
Whose succulence makes fasting bearable;
Meant to regale some moody splenetic
Who, pleasing to mistake the donor's gift,
Spying I know not what Lernæan snake[1]
I' the luscious Lenten creature, stamps forsooth
The dainty in the dust.

Enough! Prepare,
Such lunes announced, for downright lunacy!
Insanit homo, threat succeeds to threat,
And blow redoubles blow,—his wife, the block.
But, if a block, shall not she jar the hand
That buffets her? The injurious idle stone
Rebounds and hits the head of him who flung.
Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful cause,
Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.
Rebellion, say I?—rather, self-defence,
Laudable wish to live and see good days,
Pricks our Pompilia now to fly the fool
By any means, at any price,—nay, more,
Nay, most of all, i' the very interest
O' the fool that, baffled of his blind desire
At any price, were truliest victor so.
Shall he effect his crime and lose his soul?
No, dictates duty to a loving wife!
Far better that the unconsummate blow,
Adroitly baulked by her, should back again,
Correctively admonish his own pate!

Crime then,—the Court is with me?—she must crush:
How crush it? By all efficacious means;
And these,—why, what in woman should they be?
"With horns the bull, with teeth the lion fights;
"To woman," quoth the lyrist[2] quoted late,
"Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty, Nature gave."
Pretty i' the Pagan! Who dares blame the use
Of armoury thus allowed for natural,—
Exclaim against a seeming-dubious play
O' the sole permitted weapon, spear and shield
Alike, resorted to i' the circumstance
By poor Pompilia? Grant she somewhat plied
Arts that allure, the magic nod and wink,
The witchery of gesture, spell of word,
Whereby the likelier to enlist this friend,
Yea stranger, as a champion on her side?
Such man, being but mere man, ('twas all she knew),
Must be made sure by beauty's silken bond,
The weakness that subdues the strong, and bows
Wisdom alike and folly. Grant the tale
O' the husband, which is false, were proved and true
To the letter—or the letters, I should say,
Abominations he professed to find
And fix upon Pompilia and the priest,—
Allow them hers—for though she could not write,
In early days of Eve-like innocence
That plucked no apple from the knowledge-tree,
Yet, at the Serpent's word, Eve plucks and eats
And knows—especially how to read and write:

[1] *Lernæan snake:* a reference to the hydra of Lerna, killed by Hercules.

[2] *The lyrist:* Anacreon. *See* l. 226.

And so Pompilia,—as the move o' the maw,
Quoth Persius,[1] makes a parrot bid "Good day!"
A crow salute the concave, and a pie
Endeavour at proficiency in speech,—
So she, through hunger after fellowship,
May well have learned, though late, to play the scribe:
As indeed, there's one letter on the list
Explicitly declares did happen here.
"You thought my letters could be none of mine,"
She tells her parents—"mine, who wanted skill;
"But now I have the skill, and write, you see!"
She needed write love-letters, so she learned,
"*Negatas artifex sequi voces*"—though
This letter nowise 'scapes the common lot,
But lies i' the condemnation of the rest,
Found by the husband's self who forged them all.
Yet, for the sacredness of argument,
For this once an exemption shall it plead—
Anything, anything to let the wheels
Of argument run glibly to their goal!
Concede she wrote (which were preposterous)
This and the other epistle,—what of it?
Where does the figment touch her candid fame?
Being in peril of her life—"my life,
"Not an hour's purchase," as the letter runs,—
And having but one stay in this extreme,
Out of the wide world but a single friend—
What could she other than resort to him,
And how with any hope resort but thus?
Shall modesty dare bid a stranger brave
Danger, disgrace, nay death in her behalf—
Think to entice the sternness of the steel
Yet spare love's loadstone moving manly mind?
—Most of all, when such mind is hampered so
By growth of circumstance athwart the life
O' the natural man, that decency forbids
He stoop and take the common privilege,
Say frank "I love," as all the vulgar do.
A man is wedded to philosophy,
Married to statesmanship; a man is old;
A man is fettered by the foolishness
He took for wisdom and talked ten years since;
A man is, like our friend the Canon here,
A priest, and wicked if he break his vow:
Shall he dare love, who may be Pope one day?
Despite the coil of such encumbrance here,
Suppose this man could love, unhappily,
And would love, dared he only let love show!
In case the woman of his love speaks first,
From what embarrassment she sets him free!
"'Tis I who break reserve, begin appeal,
"Confess that, whether you love me or no,
"I love you!" What an ease to dignity,
What help of pride from the hard high-backed chair
Down to the carpet where the kittens bask,
All under the pretence of gratitude!

From all which, I deduce—the lady here
Was bound to proffer nothing short of love
To the priest whose service was to save her.
What?
Shall she propose him lucre, dust o' the mine,
Rubbish o' the rock, some diamond, muck-worms prize,
Some pearl secreted by a sickly fish?
Scarcely! She caters for a generous taste.
'Tis love shall beckon, beauty bid to breast,
Till all the Samson sink into the snare!
Because, permit the end—permit therewith
Means to the end!
How say you, good my lords?
I hope you heard my adversary ring
The changes on this precept: now, let me
Reverse the peal! *Quia dato licito fine,*
Ad illum assequendum ordinata
Non sunt damnanda media,—licit end
Enough was found in mere escape from death,
To legalize our means illicit else
Of feigned love, false allurement, fancied fact.
Thus Venus losing Cupid on a day,

[1] *Persius:* Prologue to *Satires*, 6–13.

(See that *Idyllium Moschi*[1]) seeking help,
In the anxiety of motherhood,
Allowably promised "Who shall bring report
"Where he is wandered to, my winged babe,
"I give him for reward a nectared kiss;
"But who brings safely back the truant's self,
"His be a super-sweet makes kiss seem cold!"
Are not these things writ for example-sake?

To such permitted motive, then, refer
All those professions, else were hard explain,
Of hope, fear, jealousy, and the rest of love!
He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis[2] she,
She burns, he freezes,—all a mere device
To catch and keep the man, may save her life,
Whom otherwise nor catches she nor keeps!
Worst, once, turns best now: in all faith, she feigns:
Feigning,—the liker innocence to guilt,
The truer to the life in what she feigns!
How if Ulysses,—when, for public good
He sunk particular qualms and played the spy,
Entered Troy's hostile gate in beggar's garb—
How if he first had boggled at this clout,
Grown dainty o'er that clack-dish? Grime is grace
To whoso gropes amid the dung for gold.

Hence, beyond promises, we praise each proof
That promise was not simply made to break,
Mere moonshine-structure meant to fade at dawn:
We praise, as consequent and requisite,
What, enemies allege, were more than words,
Deeds—meetings at the window, twilight-trysts,
Nocturnal entertainments in the dim
Old labyrinthine palace; lies, we know—
Inventions we, long since, turned inside out.
Must such external semblance of intrigue
Demonstrate that intrigue there lurks perdue?
Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut?

[1] *Idyllium Moschi:* Moschus, *Idyll* I. 4, 5.
[2] *Myrtillus, Amaryllis:* typical pastoral lovers.

He were a Molinist who dared maintain
That midnight meetings in a screened alcove
Must argue folly in a matron—since
So would he bring a slur on Judith's self,
Commended beyond women, that she lured
The lustful to destruction through his lust.
Pompilia took not Judith's liberty,
No faulchion find you in her hand to smite,
No damsel to convey in dish the head
Of Holophernes,—style the Canon so—
Or is it the Count? If I entangle me
With my similitudes,—if wax wings melt,
And earthward down I drop, not mine the fault:
Blame your beneficence, O Court, O sun,
Whereof the beamy smile affects my flight!
What matter, so Pompilia's fame revive
I' the warmth that proves the bane of Icarus?

Yea, we have shown it lawful, necessary
Pompilia leave her husband, seek the house
O' the parents: and because 'twixt home and home
Lies a long road with many a danger rife,
Lions by the way and serpents in the path,
To rob and ravish,—much behoves she keep
Each shadow of suspicion from fair fame,
For her own sake much, but for his sake more,
The ingrate husband's. Evidence shall be,
Plain witness to the world how white she walks
I' the mire she wanders through ere Rome she reach.
And who so proper witness as a priest?
Gainsay ye? Let me hear who dares gainsay!
I hope we still can punish heretics!
"Give me the man" I say with him of Gath,
"That we may fight together!" None, I think:
The priest is granted me.

Then, if a priest,
One juvenile and potent: else, mayhap,
That dragon, our Saint George would slay, slays him.
And should fair face accompany strong hand,
The more complete equipment: nothing mars

Work, else praiseworthy, like a bodily flaw
I' the worker: as 'tis said Saint Paul himself
Deplored the check o' the puny presence, still
Cheating his fulmination of its flash,
Albeit the bolt therein went true to oak.
Therefore the agent, as prescribed, she takes,—
Both juvenile and potent, handsome too,—
In all obedience: "good," you grant again.
Do you? I would you were the husband, lords!
How prompt and facile might departure be!
How boldly would Pompilia and the priest
March out of door, spread flag at beat of drum,
But that inapprehensive Guido grants
Neither premiss nor yet conclusion here,
And, purblind, dreads a bear in every bush!
For his own quietude and comfort, then,
Means must be found for flight in masquerade
At hour when all things sleep.—"Save jealousy!"
Right, Judges! Therefore shall the lady's wit
Supply the boon thwart nature baulks him of,
And do him service with the potent drug
(Helen's nepenthe,[1] as my lords opine)
Which respites blessedly each fretted nerve
O' the much-enduring man: accordingly,
There lies he, duly dosed and sound asleep,
Relieved of woes or real or raved about.
While soft she leaves his side, he shall not wake;
Nor stop who steals away to join her friend,
Nor do him mischief should he catch that friend
Intent on more than friendly office,—nay,
Nor get himself raw head and bones laid bare
In payment of his apparition!

Thus
Would I defend the step,—were the thing true
Which is a fable,—see my former speech,—
That Guido slept (who never slept a wink)
Through treachery, an opiate from his wife,
Who not so much as knew what opiates mean.

Now she may start: or hist,—a stoppage still!
A journey is an enterprise of cost!
As in campaigns, we fight but others pay,
Suis expensis, nemo militat.[2]
'Tis Guido's self we guard from accident,
Ensuring safety to Pompilia, versed
Nowise in misadventures by the way,
Hard riding and rough quarters, the rude fare,
The unready host. What magic mitigates
Each plague of travel to the unpractised wife?
Money, sweet Sirs! And were the fiction fact
She helped herself thereto with liberal hand
From out her husband's store,—what fitter use
Was ever husband's money destined to?
With bag and baggage thus did Dido once
Decamp,—for more authority, a queen!

So is she fairly on her route at last,
Prepared for either fortune: nay and if
The priest, now all a-glow with enterprise,
Cool somewhat presently when fades the flush
O' the first adventure, clouded o'er belike
By doubts, misgivings how the day may die,
Though born with such auroral brilliance, —if
The brow seem over-pensive and the lip
'Gin lag and lose the prattle lightsome late,—
Vanquished by tedium of a prolonged jaunt
In a close carriage o'er a jolting road,
With only one young female substitute
For seventeen other Canons of ripe age
Were wont to keep him company in church,—
Shall not Pompilia haste to dissipate
The silent cloud that, gathering, bodes her bale?—
Prop the irresoluteness may portend
Suspension of the project, check the flight,
Bring ruin on them both? Use every means,

[1] *Nepenthe:* a drug given to Helen by the Egyptian Polydamna, producing forgetfulness of pain (Homer, *Od.* IV. 220–230).

[2] *Suis expensis, nemo militat:* "no one goeth a warfare at his own cost."

Since means to the end are lawful! What i' the way
Of wile should have allowance like a kiss
Sagely and sisterly administered,
Sororia saltem oscula? We find
Such was the remedy her wit applied
To each incipient scruple of the priest,
If we believe,—as, while my wit is mine
I cannot,—what the driver testifies,
Borsi, called Venerino, the mere tool
Of Guido and his friend the Governor,—
Avowal I proved wrung from out the wretch,
After long rotting in imprisonment,
As price of liberty and favour: long
They tempted, he at last succumbed, and lo
Counted them out full tale each kiss and more,
"The journey being one long embrace," quoth he.
Still, though we should believe the driver's lie,
Nor even admit as probable excuse,
Right reading of the riddle,—as I urged
In my first argument, with fruit perhaps—
That what the owl-like eyes (at back of head!)
O' the driver, drowsed by driving night and day,
Supposed a vulgar interchange of lips,
This was but innocent jog of head 'gainst head,
Cheek meeting jowl as apple may touch pear
From branch and branch contiguous in the wind,
When Autumn blusters and the orchard rocks:—
That rapid run and the rough road were cause
O' the casual ambiguity, no harm
I' the world to eyes awake and penetrative.
Say,—not to grasp a truth I can release
And safely fight without, yet conquer still,—
Say, she kissed him, say, he kissed her again!
Such osculation was a potent means,
A very efficacious help, no doubt:
Such with a third part of her nectar did
Venus imbue: why should Pompilia fling
The poet's declaration in his teeth?—
Pause to employ what—since it had success,
And kept the priest her servant to the end—
We must presume of energy enough,
No whit superfluous, so permissible?

The goal is gained: day, night and yet a day
Have run their round: a long and devious road
Is traversed,—many manners, various men
Passed in review, what cities did they see,
What hamlets mark, what profitable food
For after-meditation cull and store!
Till Rome, that Rome whereof—this voice
Would it might make our Molinists observe,
That she is built upon a rock nor shall
Their powers prevail against her!—Rome, I say,
Is all but reached; one stage more and they stop
Saved: pluck up heart, ye pair, and forward, then!

Ah, Nature—baffled she recurs, alas!
Nature imperiously exacts her due,
Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak:
Pompilia needs must acquiesce and swoon,
Give hopes alike and fears a breathing-while.
The innocent sleep soundly: sound she sleeps,
So let her slumber, then, unguarded save
By her own chastity, a triple mail,
And his good hand whose stalwart arms have borne
The sweet and senseless burthen like a babe
From coach to couch,—the serviceable strength!
Nay, what and if he gazed rewardedly
On the pale beauty prisoned in embrace,
Stooped over, stole a balmy breath perhaps
For more assurance sleep was not decease—
"*Ut vidi*," "how I saw!" succeeded by
"*Ut perii*," "how I sudden lost my brains!"
—What harm ensued to her unconscious quite?
For, curiosity—how natural!
Importunateness—what a privilege
In the ardent sex! And why curb ardour here?
How can the priest but pity whom he saved?
And pity is so near to love, and love
So neighbourly to all unreasonableness!

As to love's object, whether love were sage
Or foolish, could Pompilia know or care,
Being still sound asleep, as I premised?
Thus the philosopher absorbed by thought,
Even Archimedes, busy o'er a book
The while besiegers sacked his Syracuse,
Was ignorant of the imminence o' the point
O' the sword till it surprised him: let it stab,
And never knew himself was dead at all.
So sleep thou on, secure whate'er betide!
For thou, too, hast thy problem hard to solve—
How so much beauty is compatible
With so much innocence!

Fit place, methinks,
While in this task she rosily is lost,
To treat of and repel objection here
Which,—frivolous, I grant,—my mind misgives,
May somehow still have flitted, gadfly-like,
And teased the Court at times—as if, all said
And done, there seemed, the Court might nearly say,
In a certain acceptation, somewhat more
Of what may pass for insincerity,
Falsehood, throughout the course Pompilia took,
Than befits Christian. Pagans held, we know,
Man always ought to aim at good and truth,
Not always put one thing in the same words:
Non idem semper dicere sed spectare
Debemus. But the Pagan yoke was light;
"Lie not at all," the exacter precept bids:
Each least lie breaks the law,—is sin, we hold.
I humble me, but venture to submit—
What prevents sin, itself is sinless, sure:
And sin, which hinders sin of deeper dye,
Softens itself away by contrast so.
Conceive me! Little sin, by none at all,
Were properly condemned for great: but great,
By greater, dwindles into small again.
Now, what is greatest sin of womanhood?
That which unwomans it, abolishes
The nature of the woman,—impudence.
Who contradicts me here? Concede me, then,
Whatever friendly fault may interpose
To save the sex from self-abolishment
Is three-parts on the way to virtue's rank!
And, what is taxed here as duplicity,
Feint, wile and trick,—admitted for the nonce,—
What worse do one and all than interpose,
Hold, as it were, a deprecating hand,
Statuesquely, in the Medicean mode,[1]
Before some shame which modesty would veil?
Who blames the gesture prettily perverse?
Thus,—lest ye miss a point illustrative,—
Admit the husband's calumny—allow
That the wife, having penned the epistle fraught
With horrors, charge on charge of crime she heaped
O' the head of Pietro and Violante—(still
Presumed her parents)—having despatched the same
To their arch-enemy Paolo, through free choice
And no sort of compulsion in the world—
Put case she next discards simplicity
For craft, denies the voluntary act,
Declares herself a passive instrument
I' the husband's hands; that, duped by knavery,
She traced the characters she could not write,
And took on trust the unread sense which, read,
And recognized were to be spurned at once:
Allow this calumny, I reiterate!
Who is so dull as wonder at the pose
Of our Pompilia in the circumstance?
Who sees not that the too-ingenuous soul,
Repugnant even at a duty done
Which brought beneath too scrutinizing glare
The misdemeanours,—buried in the dark,—
Of the authors of her being, as believed,—
Stung to the quick at her impulsive deed,
And willing to repair what harm it worked,
She—wise in this beyond what Nero proved,
Who when folk urged the candid juvenile
To sign the warrant, doom the guilty dead,
"Would I had never learned to write," quoth he!
—Pompilia rose above the Roman, cried

[1] *In the Medicean mode: i.e.*, like the statue known as the Venus de' Medici.

"To read or write I never learned at all!"
O splendidly mendacious!

But time fleets:
Let us not linger: hurry to the end,
Since flight does end, and that disastrously.
Beware ye blame desert for unsuccess,
Disparage each expedient else to praise,
Call failure folly! Man's best effort fails.
After ten years' resistance Troy succumbed:
Could valour save a town, Troy still had stood.
Pompilia came off halting in no point
Of courage, conduct, her long journey through:
But nature sank exhausted at the close,
And as I said, she swooned and slept all night.
Morn breaks and brings the husband: we assist
At the spectacle. Discovery succeeds.
Ha, how is this? What moonstruck rage is here?
Though we confess to partial frailty now,
To error in a woman and a wife,
Is't by the rough way she shall be reclaimed?
Who bursts upon her chambered privacy?
What crowd profanes the chaste *cubiculum?*
What outcries and lewd laughter, scurril gibe
And ribald jest to scare the ministrant
Good angels that commerce with souls in sleep?
Why, had the worst crowned Guido to his wish,
Confirmed his most irrational surmise,
Yet there be bounds to man's emotion, checks
To an immoderate astonishment.
'Tis decent horror, regulated wrath,
Befit our dispensation: have we back
The old Pagan license? Shall a Vulcan clap
His net o' the sudden and expose the pair
To the unquenchable universal mirth?
A feat, antiquity saw scandal in
So clearly, that the nauseous tale thereof—
Demodocus his nugatory song[1]—
Hath ever been concluded modern stuff
Impossible to the mouth of the grave Muse,
So, foisted into that Eighth Odyssey
By some impertinent pickthank. O thou fool,
Count Guido Franceschini, what didst gain
By publishing thy secret to the world?
Were all the precepts of the wise a waste—
Bred in thee not one touch of reverence?
Admit thy wife—admonish we the fool,—
Were falseness' self, why chronicle thy shame?
Much rather should thy teeth bite out thy tongue,
Dumb lip consort with desecrated brow,
Silence become historiographer,
And thou—thine own Cornelius Tacitus!
But virtue, barred, still leaps the barrier, lords!
—Still, moon-like, penetrates the encroaching mist
And bursts, all broad and bare, on night, ye know!
Surprised, then, in the garb of truth, perhaps,
Pompilia, thus opposed, breaks obstacle,
Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure,[2]
Confronts the foe,—nay, catches at his sword
And tries to kill the intruder, he complains.
Why, so she gave her lord his lesson back,
Crowned him, this time, the virtuous woman's way,
With an exact obedience; he brought sword,
She drew the same, since swords are meant to draw.
Tell not me 'tis sharp play with tools on edge!
It was the husband chose the weapon here.
Why did not he inaugurate the game
With some gentility of apophthegm
Still pregnant on the philosophic page,
Some captivating cadence still a-lisp
O' the poet's lyre? Such spells subdue the surge,
Make tame the tempest, much more mitigate
The passions of the mind, and probably
Had moved Pompilia to a smiling blush.
No, he must needs prefer the argument
O' the blow: and she obeyed, in duty bound,
Returned him buffet ratiocinative—
Ay, in the reasoner's own interest,
For wife must follow whither husband leads,
Vindicate honour as himself prescribes,
Save him the very way himself bids save!
No question but who jumps into a quag

[1] *Demodocus his nugatory song:* in Homer, *Od.* VIII. 266–366.

[2] *Thalassian-pure:* pure as the sea; from *thalassa*, the Greek word for sea.

Should stretch forth hand and pray us "Pull me out
"By the hand!" such were the customary cry:
But Guido pleased to bid "Leave hand alone!
"Join both feet, rather, jump upon my head:
"I extricate myself by the rebound!"
And dutifully as enjoined she jumped—
Drew his own sword and menaced his own life,
Anything to content a wilful spouse.

And so he was contented—one must do
Justice to the expedient which succeeds,
Strange as it seem: at flourish of the blade,
The crowd drew back, stood breathless and abashed,
Then murmured "This should be no wanton wife,
"No conscience-stricken sinner, caught i' the act,
"And patiently awaiting our first stone:
"But a poor hard-pressed all-bewildered thing,
"Has rushed so far, misguidedly perhaps,
"Meaning no more harm than a frightened sheep.
"She sought for aid; and if she made mistake
"I' the man could aid most, why—so mortals do:
"Even the blessed Magdalen mistook
"Far less forgiveably: consult the place—
"Supposing him to be the gardener,
"'Sir,' said she, and so following." Why more words?
Forthwith the wife is pronounced innocent:
What would the husband more than gain his cause,
And find that honour flash in the world's eye,
His apprehension was lest soil had smirched?

So, happily the adventure comes to close
Whereon my fat opponent grounds his charge
Preposterous: at mid-day he groans "How dark!"
Listen to me, thou Archangelic swine!
Where is the ambiguity to blame,
The flaw to find in our Pompilia? Safe
She stands, see! Does thy comment follow quick
"Safe, inasmuch as at the end proposed;
"But thither she picked way by devious path—
"Stands dirtied, no dubiety at all!
"I recognize success, yet, all the same,
"Importunately will suggestion prompt—
"Better Pompilia gained the right to boast
"'No devious path, no doubtful patch was mine,
"'I saved my head nor sacrificed my foot!'
"Why, being in a peril, show mistrust
"Of the angels set to guard the innocent?
"Why rather hold by obvious vulgar help
"Of stratagem and subterfuge, excused
"Somewhat, but still no less a foil, a fault,
"Since low with high, and good with bad is linked?
"Methinks I view some ancient bas-relief.
"There stands Hesione[1] thrust out by Troy,
"Her father's hand has chained her to a crag,
"Her mother's from the virgin plucked the vest,
"At a safe distance both distressful watch,
"While near and nearer comes the snorting orc.
"I look that, white and perfect to the end,
"She wait till Jove despatch some demigod;
"Not that,—impatient of celestial club
"Alcmena's son should brandish at the beast,—
"She daub, disguise her dainty limbs with pitch,
"And so elude the purblind monster! Ay,
"The trick succeeds, but 'tis an ugly trick,
"Where needs have been no trick!"

My answer? Faugh;
Nimis incongrue! Too absurdly put!
Sententiam ego teneo contrariam,
Trick, I maintain, had no alternative.
The heavens were bound with brass,—Jove far at feast
(No feast like that thou didst nôt ask me to,
Arcangeli,—I heard of thy regale!)

[1] *Hesione:* daughter of Laomedon, king of Troy, exposed on a rock to avert a plague caused by her father's breach of faith, and saved by Hercules, son of Alcmena.

With the unblamed Æthiop,[1]—Hercules spun wool
I' the lap of Omphale, while Virtue shrieked—
The brute came paddling all the faster. You
Of Troy, who stood at distance, where's the aid
You offered in the extremity? Most and least,
Gentle and simple, here the Governor,
There the Archbishop, everywhere the friends,
Shook heads and waited for a miracle,
Or went their way, left Virtue to her fate.
Just this one rough and ready man leapt forth!
—Was found, sole anti-Fabius[2] (dare I say)
Who restored things, with no delay at all,
Qui haud cunctando rem restituit! He,
He only, Caponsacchi 'mid a crowd,
Caught Virtue up, carried Pompilia off
Through gaping impotence of sympathy
In ranged Arezzo: what you take for pitch,
Is nothing worse, belike, than black and blue,
Mere evanescent proof that hardy hands
Did yeoman's service, cared not where the gripe
Was more than duly energetic; bruised,
She smarts a little, but her bones are saved
A fracture, and her skin will soon show sleek.
How it disgusts when weakness, false-refined,
Censures the honest rude effective strength,—
When sickly dreamers of the impossible
Decry plain sturdiness which does the feat
With eyes wide open!
Did occasion serve,
I could illustrate, if my lords allow;
Quid vetat, what forbids I aptly ask
With Horace, that I give my anger vent,
While I let breathe, no less, and recreate,
The gravity of my Judges, by a tale?
A case in point—what though an apologue
Graced by tradition?—possibly a fact:
Tradition must precede all scripture, words
Serve as our warrant ere our books can be:
So, to tradition back we needs must go
For any fact's authority: and this
Hath lived so far (like jewel hid in muck)
On page of that old lying vanity
Called "Sepher Toldoth Yeschu:" God be praised,
I read no Hebrew,—take the thing on trust:
But I believe the writer meant no good
(Blind as he was to truth in some respects)
To our pestiferous and schismatic . . . well,
My lords' conjecture be the touchstone, show
The thing for what it is! The author lacks
Discretion, and his zeal exceeds: but zeal,—
How rare in our degenerate day! Enough!
Here is the story: fear not, I shall chop
And change a little, else my Jew would press
All too unmannerly before the Court.

It happened once,—begins this foolish Jew,
Pretending to write Christian history,—
That three, held greatest, best and worst of men,
Peter and John and Judas, spent a day
In toil and travel through the country-side
On some sufficient business—I suspect,
Suppression of some Molinism i' the bud.
Foot-sore and hungry, dropping with fatigue,
They reached by nightfall a poor lonely grange,
Hostel or inn: so, knocked and entered there.
"Your pleasure, great ones?"—"Shelter, rest and food!"
For shelter, there was one bare room above;
For rest therein, three beds of bundled straw:
For food, one wretched starveling fowl, no more—
Meat for one mouth, but mockery for three.
"You have my utmost." How should supper serve?
Peter broke silence: "To the spit with fowl!
"And while 'tis cooking, sleep!—since beds there be,
"And, so far, satisfaction of a want.
"Sleep we an hour, awake at supper-time,

[1] *With the unblamed Æthiop:* as described by Homer, *Il.* I. 423.

[2] *Anti-Fabius:* the antithesis of Q. Fabius Maximus, *qui cunctando restituit rem*, who, in the second Punic war, restored the fortunes of Rome by delay, *i.e.*, by avoiding pitched battles.

"Then each of us narrate the dream he had,
"And he whose dream shall prove the happiest, point
"The clearliest out the dreamer as ordained
"Beyond his fellows to receive the fowl,
"Him let our shares be cheerful tribute to,
"His the entire meal, may it do him good!"
Who could dispute so plain a consequence?
So said, so done: each hurried to his straw,
Slept his hour's-sleep and dreamed his dream, and woke.
"I," commenced John, "dreamed that I gained the prize
"We all aspire to: the proud place was mine,
"Throughout the earth and to the end of time
"I was the Loved Disciple: mine the meal!"
"But I," proceeded Peter, "dreamed, a word
"Gave me the headship of our company,
"Made me the Vicar and Vice-gerent, gave
"The keys of heaven and hell into my hand,
"And o'er the earth, dominion: mine the meal!"
"While I," submitted in soft under-tone
The Iscariot—sense of his unworthiness
Turning each eye up to the inmost white—
With long-drawn sigh, yet letting both lips smack,
"I have had just the pitifullest dream
"That ever proved man meanest of his mates,
"And born foot-washer and foot-wiper, nay
"Foot-kisser to each comrade of you all!
"I dreamed I dreamed; and in that mimic dream
"(Impalpable to dream as dream to fact)
"Methought I meanly chose to sleep no wink
"But wait until I heard my brethren snore;
"Then stole from couch, slipped noiseless o'er the planks,
"Slid downstairs, furtively approached the hearth,
"Found the fowl duly brown, both back and breast,
"Hissing in harmony with the cricket's chirp,
"Grilled to a point; said no grace but fell to,
"Nor finished till the skeleton lay bare.
"In penitence for which ignoble dream,
"Lo, I renounce my portion cheerfully!
"Fie on the flesh—be mine the ethereal gust,
"And yours the sublunary sustenance!
"See that whate'er be left ye give the poor!"
Down the two scuttled, one on other's heel,
Stung by a fell surmise; and found, alack,
A goodly savour, both the drumstick bones,
And that which henceforth took the appropriate name
O' the Merry-thought, in memory of the fact
That to keep wide awake is man's best dream.

So,—as was said once of Thucydides
And his sole joke, "The lion, lo, hath laughed!"—
Just so, the Governor and all that's great
I' the city, never meant that Innocence
Should quite starve while Authority sat at meat;
They meant to fling a bone at banquet's end:
Wished well to our Pompilia—in their dreams,
Nor bore the secular sword in vain—asleep.
Just so the Archbishop and all good like him
Went to bed meaning to pour oil and wine
I' the wounds of her, next day,—but long ere day,
They had burned the one and drunk the other, while
Just so, again, contrariwise, the priest
Sustained poor Nature in extremity
By stuffing barley-bread into her mouth,
Saving Pompilia (grant the parallel)
By the plain homely and straightforward way
Taught him by common sense. Let others shriek
"Oh what refined expedients did we dream
"Proved us the only fit to help the fair!"
He cried "A carriage waits, jump in with me!"

And now, this application pardoned, lords,—
This recreative pause and breathing-while,—
Back to beseemingness and gravity!
For Law steps in: Guido appeals to Law,
Demands she arbitrate,—does well for once.
O Law, of thee how neatly was it said
By that old Sophocles,[1] thou hast thy seat
I' the very breast of Jove, no meanlier throned!
Here is a piece of work now, hitherto
Begun and carried on, concluded near,
Without an eye-glance cast thy sceptre's way;
And, lo the stumbling and discomfiture!
Well may you call them "lawless" means, men take
To extricate themselves through mother-wit
When tangled haply in the toils of life!
Guido would try conclusions with his foe,
Whoe'er the foe was and whate'er the offence;
He would recover certain dowry-dues:
Instead of asking Law to lend a hand,
What pother of sword drawn and pistol cocked,
What peddling with forged letters and paid spies,
Politic circumvention!—all to end
As it began—by loss of the fool's head,
First in a figure, presently in a fact.
It is a lesson to mankind at large.
How other were the end, would men be sage
And bear confidingly each quarrel straight,
O Law, to thy recipient mother-knees!
How would the children light come and prompt go,
This with a red-cheeked apple for reward,
The other, peradventure red-cheeked too
I' the rear, by taste of birch for punishment.
No foolish brawling murder any more!
Peace for the household, practice for the Fisc,
And plenty for the exchequer of my lords!
Too much to hope, in this world: in the next,
Who knows? Since, why should sit the Twelve enthroned
To judge the tribes, unless the tribes be judged?
And 'tis impossible but offences come:
So, all's one lawsuit, all one long leet-day![2]

Forgive me this digression—that I stand
Entranced awhile at Law's first beam, outbreak
O' the business, when the Count's good angel bade
"Put up thy sword, born enemy to the ear,
"And let Law listen to thy difference!"
And Law does listen and compose the strife,
Settle the suit, how wisely and how well!
On our Pompilia, faultless to a fault,
Law bends a brow maternally severe,
Implies the worth of perfect chastity,
By fancying the flaw she cannot find.
Superfluous sifting snow, nor helps nor harms:
'Tis safe to censure levity in youth,
Tax womanhood with indiscretion, sure!
Since toys, permissible to-day, become
Follies to-morrow: prattle shocks in church:
And that curt skirt which lets a maiden skip,
The matron changes for a trailing robe.
Mothers may aim a blow with half-shut eyes
Nodding above their spindles by the fire,
And chance to hit some hidden fault, else safe.
Just so, Law hazarded a punishment—
If applicable to the circumstance,
Why, well! if not so apposite, well too.
"Quit the gay range o' the world," I hear her cry,
"Enter, in lieu, the penitential pound:
"Exchange the gauds of pomp for ashes, dust!
"Leave each mollitious haunt of luxury!
"The golden-garnished silken-couched alcove,
"The many-columned terrace that so tempts
"Feminine soul put foot forth, extend ear
"To fluttering joy of lover's serenade,—
"Leave these for cellular seclusion! mask
"And dance no more, but fast and pray! avaunt—
"Be burned, thy wicked townsman's sonnet-book!
"Welcome, mild hymnal by . . . some better scribe!
"For the warm arms were wont enfold thy flesh,
"Let wire-shirt plough and whipcord discipline!"

[1] *Sophocles: Œd. Col.* 1382, Δίκη ξύνεδρος Ζηνὸς ἀρχαίοις νόμοις.
[2] *Leet-day:* day on which the court sits.

If such an exhortation proved, perchance,
Inapplicable, words bestowed in waste,
What harm, since Law has store, can spend nor miss?

And so, our paragon submits herself,
Goes at command into the holy house,
And, also at command, comes out again:
For, could the effect of such obedience prove
Too certain, too immediate? Being healed,
Go blaze abroad the matter, blessed one!
Art thou sound forthwith? Speedily vacate
The step by pool-side, leave Bethesda free
To patients plentifully posted round,
Since the whole need not the physician! Brief,
She may betake her to her parents' place.
Welcome her, father, with wide arms once more,
Motion her, mother, to thy breast again!
For why? Since Law relinquishes the charge,
Grants to your dwelling-place a prison's style,
Rejoice you with Pompilia! golden days,
Redeunt Saturnia regna. Six weeks slip,
And she is domiciled in house and home
As though she thence had never budged at all.
And thither let the husband,—joyous, ay,
But contrite also—quick betake himself,
Proud that his dove which lay among the pots
Hath mued[1] those dingy feathers,—moulted now,
Shows silver bosom clothed with yellow gold!
So shall he tempt her to the perch she fled,
Bid to domestic bliss the truant back.

But let him not delay! Time fleets how fast,
And opportunity, the irrevocable,
Once flown will flout him! Is the furrow traced?
If field with corn ye fail preoccupy,
Darnel for wheat and thistle-beards for grain,
Infelix lolium, carduus horridus,
Will grow apace in combination prompt,
Defraud the husbandman of his desire.
Already—hist—what murmurs 'monish now
The laggard?—doubtful, nay, fantastic bruit
Of such an apparition, such return

Interdum, to anticipate the spouse,
Of Caponsacchi's very self! 'Tis said,
When nights are lone and company is rare,
His visitations brighten winter up.
If so they did—which nowise I believe—
(How can I?—proof abounding that the priest,
Once fairly at his relegation-place,
Never once left it) still, admit he stole
A midnight march, would fain see friend again,
Find matter for instruction in the past,
Renew the old adventure in such chat
As cheers a fireside! He was lonely too,
He, too, must need his recreative hour.
Shall it amaze the philosophic mind
If he, long wont the empurpled cup to quaff,
Have feminine society at will,
Being debarred abruptly from all drink
Save at the spring which Adam used for wine,
Dreads harm to just the health he hoped to guard,
And, trying abstinence, gains malady?
Ask Tozzi, now physician to the Pope!
"Little by little break"—(I hear he bids
Master Arcangeli my antagonist,
Who loves good cheer, and may indulge too much:
So I explain the logic of the plea
Wherewith he opened our proceedings late)—
"Little by little break a habit, Don,
"Become necessity to feeble flesh!"
And thus, nocturnal taste of intercourse
(Which never happened,—but, suppose it did)
May have been used to dishabituate
By sip and sip this drainer to the dregs
O' the draught of conversation,—heady stuff,
Brewage which, broached, it took two days and nights
To properly discuss i' the journey, Sirs!
Such power has second-nature, men call use,
That undelightful objects get to charm
Instead of chafe: the daily colocynth
Tickles the palate by repeated dose,
Old sores scratch kindly, the ass makes a push,
Although the mill-yoke-wound be smarting yet,
For mill-door bolted on a holiday:
Nor must we marvel here if impulse urge

[1] *Mued:* moulted.

To talk the old story over now and then,
The hopes and fears, the stoppage and the haste,—
Subjects of colloquy to surfeit once.
"Here did you bid me twine a rosy wreath!"
"And there you paid my lips a compliment!"
"Here you admired the tower could be so tall!"
"And there you likened that of Lebanon
"To the nose of the beloved!" Trifles! still,
"*Forsan et hæc olim*,"[1]—such trifles serve
To make the minutes pass in winter-time.

Husband, return then, I re-counsel thee!
For, finally, of all glad circumstance
Should make a prompt return imperative,
What in the world awaits thee, dost suppose?
O' the sudden, as good gifts are wont befall,
What is the hap of our unconscious Count?
That which lights bonfire and sets cask a-tilt,
Dissolves the stubborn'st heart in jollity.
O admirable, there is born a babe,
A son, an heir, a Franceschini last
And best o' the stock! Pompilia, thine the palm!
Repaying incredulity with faith,
Ungenerous thrift of each marital debt
With bounty in profuse expenditure,
Pompilia scorns to have the old year end
Without a present shall ring in the new—
Bestows on her too-parsimonious lord
An infant for the apple of his eye,
Core of his heart, and crown completing life,
True *summum bonum* of the earthly lot!
"We," saith ingeniously the sage, "are born
"Solely that others may be born of us."
So, father, take thy child, for thine that child,
Oh nothing doubt! In wedlock born, law holds
Baseness impossible: since "*filius est*
"*Quem nuptiæ demonstrant*," twits the text
Whoever dares to doubt.

Yet doubt he dares!
O faith, where art thou flown from out the world?
Already on what an age of doubt we fall!
Instead of each disputing for the prize,
The babe is bandied here from that to this.
Whose the babe? "*Cujum pecus?*"[2] Guido's lamb?
"*An Melibœi?*" Nay, but of the priest!
"*Non sed Ægonis!*" Someone must be sire:
And who shall say, in such a puzzling strait,
If there were not vouchsafed some miracle
To the wife who had been harassed and abused
More than enough by Guido's family
For non-production of the promised fruit
Of marriage? What if Nature, I demand,
Touched to the quick by taunts upon her sloth,
Had roused herself, put forth recondite power,
Bestowed this birth to vindicate her sway,
Like the strange favour, Maro memorized
As granted Aristæus when his hive
Lay empty of the swarm? not one more bee—
Not one more babe to Franceschini's house!
And lo, a new birth filled the air with joy,
Sprung from the bowels of the generous steer,
A novel son and heir rejoiced the Count!
Spontaneous generation, need I prove
Were facile feat to Nature at a pinch?
Let whoso doubts, steep horsehair certain weeks
In water, there will be produced a snake;
Spontaneous product of the horse, which horse
Happens to be the representative—
Now that I think on't—of Arezzo's self,
The very city our conception blessed:
Is not a prancing horse the City-arms?
What sane eye fails to see coincidence?
Cur ego, boast thou, my Pompilia, then,
Desperem fieri sine conjuge
Mater—how well the Ovidian distich suits!—
Et parere intacto dummodo
Casta viro? Such miracle was wrought!

[1] *Forsan et hæc olim meminisse iuvabit:* Virgil, *Æn.* I. 203—"Perchance one day we shall take pleasure in recalling even these experiences."

[2] *Cujum pecus*, &c.: a quotation from Virgil, *Ecl.* 3, 1, except that *sed* should be *verum*; "Whose is this flock,—Melibœus'?" "Nay, Ægon's."

Note, further, as to mark the prodigy,
The babe in question neither took the name
Of Guido, from the sire presumptive, nor
Giuseppe, from the sire potential, but
Gaetano—last saint of our hierarchy,
And newest namer for a thing so new!
What other motive could have prompted choice?

Therefore be peace again: exult, ye hills!
Ye vales rejoicingly break forth in song!
Incipe, parve puer, begin, small boy,
Risu cognoscere patrem, with a laugh
To recognize thy parent! Nor do thou
Boggle, oh parent, to return the grace!
Nec anceps hære, pater, puero
Cognoscendo — one may well eke out the prayer!
In vain! The perverse Guido doubts his eyes,
Distrusts assurance, lets the devil drive.
Because his house is swept and garnished now,
He, having summoned seven like himself,
Must hurry thither, knock and enter in,
And make the last worse than the first, indeed!
Is he content? We are. No further blame
O' the man and murder! They were stigmatized
Befittingly: the Court heard long ago
My mind o' the matter, which, outpouring full,
Has long since swept like surge, i' the simile
Of Homer, overborne both dyke and dam,
And whelmed alike client and advocate: 1394
His fate is sealed, his life as good as gone,
On him I am not tempted to waste word.
Yet though my purpose holds,—which was and is
And solely shall be to the very end,
To draw the true *effigies* of a saint,
Do justice to perfection in the sex,—
Yet let not some gross pamperer of the flesh
And niggard in the spirit's nourishment,
Whose feeding hath offuscated his wit
Rather than law,—he never had, to lose—
Let not such advocate object to me
I leave my proper function of attack!

"What's this to Bacchus?"—(in the classic phrase,
Well used, for once) he hiccups probably.
O Advocate o' the Poor, thou born to make
Their blessing void—*beati pauperes!*
By painting saintship I depicture sin:
Beside my pearl, I prove how black thy jet,
And, through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime.

Back to her, then,—with but one beauty more,
End we our argument,—one crowning grace
Pre-eminent 'mid agony and death.
For to the last Pompilia played her part,
Used the right means to the permissible end,
And, wily as an eel that stirs the mud
Thick overhead, so baffling spearman's thrust,
She, while he stabbed her, simulated death,
Delayed, for his sake, the catastrophe,
Obtained herself a respite, four days' grace,
Whereby she told her story to the world,
Enabled me to make the present speech,
And, by a full confession, saved her soul.

Yet hold, even here would malice leer its last,
Gurgle its choked remonstrance: snake, hiss free!
Oh, that's the objection? And to whom?—not her
But me, forsooth—as, in the very act
Of both confession and (what followed close)
Subsequent talk, chatter and gossipry,
Babble to sympathizing he and she
Whoever chose besiege her dying bed,—
As this were found at variance with my tale,
Falsified all I have adduced for truth,
Admitted not one peccadillo here,
Pretended to perfection, first and last,
O' the whole procedure—perfect in the end,
Perfect i' the means, perfect in everything,
Leaving a lawyer nothing to excuse,
Reason away and show his skill about!
—A flight, impossible to Adamic flesh,
Just to be fancied, scarcely to be wished,
And, anyhow, unpleadable in court!
"How reconcile," gasps Malice, "that with this?"

Your "this," friend, is extraneous to the law,
Comes of men's outside meddling, the unskilled
Interposition of such fools as press
Out of their province. Must I speak my mind?
Far better had Pompilia died o' the spot
Than found a tongue to wag and shame the law,
Shame most of all herself,—could friendship fail
And advocacy lie less on the alert:
But no, they shall protect her to the end!
Do I credit the alleged narration? No!
Lied our Pompilia then, to laud herself?
Still, no! Clear up what seems discrepancy?
The means abound: art's long, though time is short;
So, keeping me in compass, all I urge
Is—since, confession at the point of death,
Nam in articulo mortis, with the Church
Passes for statement honest and sincere,
Nemo presumitur reus esse,—then,
If sure that all affirmed would be believed,
'Twas charity, in her so circumstanced,
To spend the last breath in one effort more
For universal good of friend and foe:
And,—by pretending utter innocence,
Nay, freedom from each foible we forgive,—
Re-integrate—not solely her own fame,
But do the like kind office for the priest
Whom telling the crude truth about might vex,
Haply expose to peril, abbreviate
Indeed the long career of usefulness
Presumably before him: while her lord,
Whose fleeting life is forfeit to the law,—
What mercy to the culprit if, by just
The gift of such a full certificate
Of his immitigable guiltiness,
She stifled in him the absurd conceit
Of murder as it were a mere revenge
—Stopped confirmation of that jealousy
Which, did she but acknowledge the first flaw,
The faintest foible, had emboldened him
To battle with the charge, baulk penitence,
Bar preparation for impending fate!
Whereas, persuade him that he slew a saint
Who sinned not even where she may have sinned,
You urge him all the brisklier to repent
Of most and least and aught and everything!
Still, if this view of mine content you not,
Lords, nor excuse the genial falsehood here,
We come to our *Triarii*,[1] last resource:
We fall back on the inexpugnable,
Submitting,—she confessed before she talked!
The sacrament obliterates the sin:
What is not,—was not, therefore, in a sense.
Let Molinists distinguish, "Souls washed white
"But red once, still show pinkish to the eye!"
We say, abolishment is nothingness,
And nothingness has neither head nor tail,
End nor beginning! Better estimate
Exorbitantly, than disparage aught
Of the efficacy of the act, I hope!

Solvuntur tabulæ?[2] May we laugh and go?
Well,—not before (in filial gratitude
To Law, who, mighty mother, waves adieu)
We take on us to vindicate Law's self!
For,—yea, Sirs,—curb the start, curtail the stare!—
Remains that we apologize for haste
I' the Law, our lady who here bristles up
"Blame my procedure? Could the Court mistake?
"(Which were indeed a misery to think)
"Did not my sentence in the former stage
"O' the business bear a title plain enough?
"*Decretum*"—I translate it word for word—
"'Decreed: the priest, for his complicity
"'I' the flight and deviation of the dame,
"'As well as for unlawful intercourse,
"'Is banished three years:' crime and penalty,
"Declared alike. If he be taxed with guilt,
"How can you call Pompilia innocent?
"If both be innocent, have I been just?"

Gently, O mother, judge men—whose mistake
Is in the mere misapprehensiveness!

[1] *Triarii:* the third rank in the old formation of the Roman legion, containing the oldest soldiers, and only called upon at the crisis of a battle.

[2] *Solvuntur tabulæ:* from Horace, *Sat.* II. 1, 86—*solventur risu tabulæ*, "the court will break up in laughter."

The *Titulus* a-top of your decree
Was but to ticket there the kind of charge
You in good time would arbitrate upon.
Title is one thing,—arbitration's self,
Probatio, quite another possibly.
Subsistit, there holds good the old response,
Responsio tradita, we must not stick,
Quod non sit attendendus Titulus,
To the Title, *sed Probatio*, but the Proof,
Resultans ex processu, the result
O' the Trial, and the style of punishment,
Et pœna per sententiam imposita.
All is tentative, till the sentence come:
An indication of what men expect,
But nowise an assurance they shall find.
Lords, what if we permissibly relax
The tense bow, as the law-god Phœbus bids,
Relieve our gravity at labour's close?
I traverse Rome, feel thirsty, need a draught,
Look for a wine-shop, find it by the bough
Projecting as to say "Here wine is sold!"
So much I know,—"sold:" but what sort of wine?
Strong, weak, sweet, sour, home-made or foreign drink?
That much must I discover by myself.
"Wine is sold," quoth the bough, "but good or bad,
"Find, and inform us when you smack your lips!"
Exactly so, Law hangs her title forth,
To show she entertains you with such case
About such crime. Come in! she pours, you quaff.
You find the Priest good liquor in the main,
But heady and provocative of brawls:
Remand the residue to flask once more,
Lay it low where it may deposit lees,
I' the cellar: thence produce it presently,
Three years the brighter and the better!

Thus,
Law's son, have I bestowed my filial help,
And thus I end, *tenax proposito;*
Point to point as I purposed have I drawn
Pompilia, and implied as terribly
Guido: so, gazing, let the world crown Law—
Able once more, despite my impotence,
And helped by the acumen of the Court,
To eliminate, display, make triumph truth!
What other prize than truth were worth the pains?

There's my oration—much exceeds in length
That famed panegyric of Isocrates,
They say it took him fifteen years to pen.
But all those ancients could say anything!
He put in just what rushed into his head:
While I shall have to prune and pare and print.
This comes of being born in modern times
With priests for auditory. Still, it pays.

X.—THE POPE.

Like to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I will begin,—as is, these seven years now,
My daily wont,—and read a History
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
To the last digit, ages ere my birth)
Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome:
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
Since of the making books there is no end.
And so I have the Papacy complete
From Peter first to Alexander last;
Can question each and take instruction so.
Have I to dare?—I ask, how dared this Pope?
To suffer?—Suchanone, how suffered he?
Being about to judge, as now, I seek
How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope;
Study some signal judgment that subsists
To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals
The sum up of what gain or loss to God
Came of His one more Vicar in the world.
So, do I find example, rule of life;
So, square and set in order the next page,
Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year
I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope,
Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.
Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here
Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,
Read,—How there was a ghastly Trial once
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes:
Thus—in the antique penman's very phrase.

"Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,
"Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
"While choler quivered on his brow and beard,
"'Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch,
"'That claimedst to be late Pope as even I!'

"And at the word the great door of the church
"Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus' self,
"The body of him, dead, even as embalmed
"And buried duly in the Vatican
"Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.
"They set it, that dead body of a Pope,
"Clothed in pontific vesture now again,
"Upright on Peter's chair as if alive.

"And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously
"'Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume
"'To leave that see and take this Roman see,
"'Exchange the lesser for the greater see,
"'—A thing against the canons of the Church?'

"Then one—(a Deacon who, observing forms,
"Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,
"Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse)—
"Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth
"With white lips and dry tongue,—as but a youth,
"For frightful was the corpse-face to behold,—
"How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

"But when, for his last precedent of all,
"Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts
"'And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
"'Vacate the lesser for the greater see,
"'Half a year since change Arago for Rome?'
"'—Ye have the sin's defence now, Synod mine!'
"Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage:
"'Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive!
"'Hath he intruded, or do I pretend?
"'Judge, judge!'—breaks wavelike one whole foam of wrath.

"Whereupon they, being friends and followers,
"Said 'Ay, thou art Christ's Vicar, and not he!
"'Away with what is frightful to behold!
"'This act was uncanonic and a fault.'

"Then, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed
"'So, guilty! So, remains I punish guilt!
"'He is unpoped, and all he did I damn:
"'The Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade:
"'Depose to laics those he raised to priests:
"'What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,
"'It is confusion, let it vex no more!
"'Since I revoke, annul and abrogate
"'All his decrees in all kinds: they are void!
"'In token whereof and warning to the world,
"'Strip me yon miscreant of those robes usurped,
"'And clothe him with vile serge befitting such!
"'Then hale the carrion to the market-place:
"'Let the town-hangman chop from his right hand
"'Those same three fingers which he blessed withal;
"'Next cut the head off once was crowned forsooth:
"'And last go fling them, fingers, head and trunk,
"'To Tiber that my Christian fish may sup!'

"—Either because of ΙΧΘΥΣ which means Fish
"And very aptly symbolizes Christ,
"Or else because the Pope is Fisherman,
"And seals with Fisher's-signet.

"Anyway,
"So said, so done: himself, to see it done,
"Followed the corpse they trailed from street to street
"Till into Tiber wave they threw the thing.
"The people, crowded on the banks to see,
"Were loud or mute, wept or laughed, cursed or jeered,
"According as the deed addressed their sense;
"A scandal verily: and out spake a Jew
"'Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus?'

"Now when, Formosus being dead a year,
"His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn,
"Made captive by the mob and strangled straight,
"Romanus, his successor for a month,
"Did make protest Formosus was with God,
"Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed.
"Next Theodore, who reigned but twenty days,
"Therein convoked a synod, whose decree
"Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped,
"And do away with Stephen as accursed.
"So that when presently certain fisher-folk
"(As if the queasy river could not hold
"Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal)
"Produced the timely product of their nets,
"The mutilated man, Formosus,—saved
"From putrefaction by the embalmer's spice,
"Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh,—
"'Why, lay the body again,' bade Theodore,
"'Among his predecessors, in the church
"'And burial-place of Peter!' which was done.
"'And,' addeth Luitprand, 'many of repute,
"'Pious and still alive, avouch to me
"'That, as they bore the body up the aisle,'
"'The saints in imaged row bowed each his head
"'For welcome to a brother-saint come back.'
"As for Romanus and this Theodore,
"These two Popes, through the brief reign granted each,
"Could but initiate what John came to close
"And give the final stamp to: he it was
"Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides)
"Who,—in full synod at Ravenna held
"With Bishops seventy-four, and present too
"Eude King of France with his Archbishopry,—
"Did condemn Stephen, anathematize
"The disinterment, and make all blots blank,
"'For,' argueth here Auxilius in a place
"*De Ordinationibus*, 'precedents
"'Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,
"'Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,—
"'Marinus, for example:' read the tract.

"But, after John, came Sergius, reaffirmed
"The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
"Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.
"And here,—because the matter went to ground,
"Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age,—
"Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,
"Her sentence that subsists unto this day.
"Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
"I' the Church, Formosus was a holy man."

Which of the judgments was infallible?
Which of my predecessors spoke for God?
And what availed Formosus that this cursed,
That blessed, and then this other cursed again?
"Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body
"And not the soul," saith Christ, "but rather those
"Can cast both soul and body into hell!"

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,
Exact eight hundred years ago to-day
When, sitting in his stead, Vice-gerent here,
I must give judgment on my own behoof.
So worked the predecessor: now, my turn!

In God's name! Once more on this earth of God's,
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him—
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see
Another poor weak trembling human wretch
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
From this world to the next,—gives way and way,
Just on the edge over the awful dark:
With nothing to arrest him but my feet.
He catches at me with convulsive face,
Cries "Leave to live the natural minute more!"
While hollowly the avengers echo "Leave?
"None! So has he exceeded man's due share
"In man's fit license, wrung by Adam's fall,
"To sin and yet not surely die,—that we,
"All of us sinful, all with need of grace,
"All chary of our life,—the minute more
"Or minute less of grace which saves a soul,—
"Bound to make common cause with who craves time,
"—We yet protest against the exorbitance
"Of sin in this one sinner, and demand
"That his poor sole remaining piece of time
"Be plucked from out his clutch: put him to death!
"Punish him now! As for the weal or woe
"Hereafter, God grant mercy! Man be just,
"Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free!"
And I am bound, the solitary judge,
To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,
And either hold a hand out, or withdraw
A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.
Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance
Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm
And yonder passion that I have to bear,—
As if reprieve were possible for both
Prisoner and Pope,—how easy were reprieve!
A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word
To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,
I' the passage there, and I should gain the life!—
Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus,
I know it is but nature's craven-trick.
The case is over, judgment at an end,
And all things done now and irrevocable:
A mere dead man is Franceschini here,
Even as Formosus centuries ago.
I have worn through this sombre wintry day,
With winter in my soul beyond the world's,
Over these dismalest of documents
Which drew night down on me ere eve befell,—
Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact
Beside fact's self, these summaries to-wit,—
How certain three were slain by certain five:
I read here why it was, and how it went,
And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse,
And how law rather chose defence should lie,—
What argument he urged by wary word
When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,
And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat
When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore
And glutted hunger on the truth, at last,—
No matter for the flesh and blood between.
All's a clear rede and no more riddle now.
Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these—
Not absolutely in a portion, yet
Evolvible from the whole: evolved at last
Painfully, held tenaciously by me.
Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
When I shall write the brief word presently
And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do.

Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound
With the pine-trees on it yonder! Some surmise,
Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
Mine may fail here? Suppose it so,—what then?
Say,—Guido, I count guilty, there's no babe
So guiltless, for I misconceive the man!
What's in the chance should move me from my mind?
If, as I walk in a rough country-side,
Peasants of mine cry "Thou art he can help,
"Lord of the land and counted wise to boot:
"Look at our brother, strangling in his foam,
"He fell so where we find him,—prove thy worth!"
I may presume, pronounce, "A frenzy-fit,
"A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke!
"Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once!"
So perishes the patient, and anon
I hear my peasants—"All was error, lord!
"Our story, thy prescription: for there crawled
"In due time from our hapless brother's breast
"The serpent which had stung him: bleeding slew
"Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health."
What other should I say than "God so willed:
"Mankind is ignorant, a man am I:
"Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin!"
So and not otherwise, in after-time,
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound
This multifarious mass of words and deeds
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.
"God who set me to judge thee, meted out
"So much of judging faculty, no more:
"Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof!"
I hold a heavier fault imputable
Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,
For no cause,—no, if I must bare my heart,—
Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass.
For I am ware it is the seed of act,
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence on the world below,
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.
Therefore I stand on my integrity,
Nor fear at all: and if I hesitate,
It is because I need to breathe awhile,
Rest, as the human right allows, review
Intent the little seeds of act, my tree,—
The thought, which, clothed in deed, I give the world
At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day!
Winter's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,
To dash the boldness of advancing March!
Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets
Of gossipry; pert tongue and idle ear
By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.
But wheresoe'er Rome gathers in the grey,
Two names now snap and flash from mouth to mouth—
(Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope.
By this same hour to-morrow eve—aha,
How do they call him?—the sagacious Swede
Who finds by figures how the chances prove,
Why one comes rather than another thing,
As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice,
Or, if we dip in Virgil here and there
And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.
Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,
Two men are in our city this dull eve;
One doomed to death,—but hundreds in such plight
Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law
Which leans to mercy in this latter time;
Moreover in the plenitude of life
Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit,
Presumably of service here: beside,
The man is noble, backed by nobler friends:
Nay, they so wish him well, the city's self

Makes common cause with who — house-magistrate,
Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord—
But ruled his own, let aliens cavil. Die?
He'll bribe a gaoler or break prison first!
Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,
And bid the favourite malefactor march.
Calculate now these chances of escape!
"It is not probable, but well may be."
Again, there is another man, weighed now
By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,
Appointed overweight to break our branch.
And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow,
All the world's cark and care, though a bird's nest
Were a superfluous burthen: notably
Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,
From to-day's dawn till now that day departs,
Trying one question with true sweat of soul
"Shall the said doomed man fitlier die or live?"
When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool
Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff
That's incident to such a smoking flax,
Hurries the natural end and quenches him!
Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,
Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that?
"That, possibly, this in all likelihood."
I thought so: yet thou tripp'st, my foreign friend!
No, it will be quite otherwise,—to-day
Is Guido's last: my term is yet to run.

But say the Swede were right, and I forthwith
Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead:
Why, then I stand already in God's face
And hear "Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
"Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine!
"For in the last is summed the first and all,—
"What thy life last put heart and soul into,
"There shall I taste thy product." I must plead
This condemnation of a man to-day.

Not so! Expect nor question nor reply
At what we figure as God's judgment-bar!
None of this vile way by the barren words
Which, more than any deed, characterize
Man as made subject to a curse: no speech—
That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
As the split skin across the coppery snake,
And most denotes man! since, in all beside,
In hate or lust or guile or unbelief,
Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes,
And, in the last resort, the man may urge
"So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
"To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
"And hated, lusted, used guile, forwent faith."
But when man walks the garden of this world
For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,
Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,
Without the least incumbency to lie,
—Why, can he tell you what a rose is like,
Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false
Though truth serve better? Man must tell his mate
Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think
"He lies, it is the method of a man!"
And yet will speak for answer "It is truth"
To him who shall rejoin "Again a lie!"
Therefore these filthy rags of speech, this coil
Of statement, comment, query and response,
Tatters all too contaminate for use,
Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too,
The Word. We men, in our degree, may know
There, simply, instantaneously, as here
After long time and amid many lies,
Whatever we dare think we know indeed
—That I am I, as He is He,—what else?
But be man's method for man's life at least!
Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou
My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long

But studiedst God and man, the many years
I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese
Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands,—
Thou other force in those old busy days
Than this grey ultimate decrepitude,—
Yet sensible of fires that more and more
Visit a soul, in passage to the sky,
Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new—
Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o' the world,
Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,
Question the after-me, this self now Pope,
Hear his procedure, criticize his work?
Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.
I see him furnished forth for his career,
On starting for the life-chance in our world,
With nearly all we count sufficient help:
Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
A solid intellect: the wit to seek,
Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
To deal in whatsoever circumstance
Should minister to man, make life succeed.
Oh, and much drawback! what were earth without?
Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place
To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb,
'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove
Advantage for who vaults from low to high
And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone?
So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food:
Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth:
Straitened, whose limbs are restless till at large.
He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque
And narrow penfold for probation, pines
After the good things just outside its grate,
With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch,
Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel
Of greed unseemly, prompting grasp undue,
Than nature furnishes her main mankind,—
Making it harder to do wrong than right
The first time, careful lest the common ear
Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march.
Wherein I see a trial fair and fit
For one else too unfairly fenced about,
Set above sin, beyond his fellows here:
Guarded from the arch-tempter all must fight,
By a great birth, traditionary name,
Diligent culture, choice companionship,
Above all, conversancy with the faith
Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just
"Man is born nowise to content himself,
"But please God." He accepted such a rule,
Recognized man's obedience; and the Church,
Which simply is such rule's embodiment,
He clave to, he held on by,—nay, indeed,
Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst,
Professed so much of priesthood as might sue
For priest's-exemption where the layman sinned,—
Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would bruise.
Hence, at this moment, what's his last resource,
His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope
But that,—convicted of such crime as law
Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood,—
Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape?
Nay, the portentous brothers of the man
Are veritably priests, protected each
May do his murder in the Church's pale,
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo!
This is the man proves irreligiousest
Of all mankind, religion's parasite!
This may forsooth plead dinned ear, jaded sense,
The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell,
Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,
And cares not whether it be shade or shine,
Doling out day and night to all men else!

Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself
Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own tongue
Thus undertakes to sermonize the world?
Why, but because the solemn is safe too,
The belfry proves a fortress of a sort,
Has other uses than to teach the hour:
Turns sunscreen, paravent and ombrifuge[1]
To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,
—Ay, and attractive to unwary folk
Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,
And go home with full head but empty purse,
Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief!
Shall Judas,—hard upon the donor's heel,
To filch the fragments of the basket,—plead
He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat
Attent with fifties in a company?
No,—closer to promulgated decree,
Clearer the censure of default. Proceed!

I find him bound, then, to begin life well;
Fortified by propitious circumstance,
Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide,
How lives he? Cased thus in a coat of proof,
Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while
A puny starveling,—does the breast pant big,
The limb swell to the limit, emptiness
Strive to become solidity indeed?
Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish,
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.
Armour he boasts when a wave breaks on beach,
Or bird stoops for the prize: with peril nigh,—
The man of rank, the much-befriended-man,
The man almost affiliate to the Church,
Such is to deal with, let the world beware!

[1] *Paravent and ombrifuge:* protection against wind and rain.

Does the world recognize, pass prudently?
Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep?
Already is the slug from out its mew,
Ignobly faring with all loose and free,
Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,
A naked blotch no better than they all:
Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church,
Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul
Prostrate among the filthy feeders—faugh!
And when Law takes him by surprise at last,
Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey,
Behold, he points to shell left high and dry,
Pleads "But the case out yonder is myself!"
Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,
Congenial vermin; that was none of thee,
Thine outside,—give it to the soldier-crab!

For I find this black mark impinge the man,
That he believes in just the vile of life.
Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth?
Then, that aforesaid armour, probity
He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale;
Honour and faith,—a lie and a disguise,
Probably for all livers in this world,
Certainly for himself! All say good words
To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds
To who must undergo; so thrive mankind!
See this habitual creed exemplified
Most in the last deliberate act; as last,
So, very sum and substance of the soul
Of him that planned and leaves one perfect piece,
The sin brought under jurisdiction now,
Even the marriage of the man: this act
I sever from his life as sample, show
For Guido's self, intend to test him by,
As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,
By the components we decide enough
Or to let flow as late, or staunch the source.

He purposes this marriage, I remark,
On no one motive that should prompt thereto—
Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged
Appropriate to the action; so they were:
The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took.
Not one permissible impulse moves the man,

From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
To the true longing of the heart that loves,
No trace of these: but all to instigate,
Is what sinks man past level of the brute
Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
All is the lust for money: to get gold,—
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder! Make
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence!
What good else get from bodies and from souls?
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
—What, where or how, appreciate those who tell
How the toad lives: it lives,—enough for me!
To get this good,—with but a groan or so,
Then, silence of the victims,—were the feat.
He foresaw, made a picture in his mind,—
Of father and mother stunned and echoless
To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws
Their folly danced into, till the woe fell;
Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty
From even the poor nook whence they watched the wolf
Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey;
Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth,
(What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole)
Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,
And leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope
Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,
His slave, his chattel, to first use, then destroy.
All this, he bent mind how to bring about,
Put plain in act and life, as painted plain,
So have success, reach crown of earthly good,
In this particular enterprise of man,
By marriage—undertaken in God's face
With all these lies so opposite God's truth,
For end so other than man's end.

Thus schemes
Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme:
But when an obstacle first blocks the path,
When he finds none may boast monopoly
Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world,—
That sorry timid natures, even this sort
O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie
Proper to the kind,—that as the gor-crow treats
The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth,
And the great Guido is minutely matched
By this same couple,—whether true or false
The revelation of Pompilia's birth,
Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought,—
Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage,
Leaves the low region to the finch and fly,
Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl
May dare the inimitable swoop. I see.
He draws now on the curious crime, the fine
Felicity and flower of wickedness;
Determines, by the utmost exercise
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,
To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang
From the parents, else would triumph out of reach,
By punishing their child, within reach yet,
Who, by thought, word or deed, could no-wise wrong
I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,
Always subordinating (note the point!)
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest
The meaner,—would pluck pang forth, but unclench
No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece.
Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,
His wife, so putting, day by day, hour by hour,
The untried torture to the untouched place,
As must precipitate an end foreseen,
Goad her into some plain revolt, most like
Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,
Death to herself, damnation by rebound
To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds still:
Such plan as, in its bad completeness, shall
Ruin the three together and alike,
Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,
No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,
His person unendangered, his good fame
Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact,—
While they, with all their claims and rights that cling,
Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,
Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.
As when, in our Campagna, there is fired

The nest-like work that overruns a hut;
And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere,
Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound
And blessed the home where men were happy once,
There rises gradual, black amid the blaze,
Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest,—
Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb
They thought a temple in their ignorance,
And clung about and thought to lean upon—
There laughs it o'er their ravage,—where are they?
So did his cruelty burn life about,
And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulness,
Try the persistency of torment so
Upon the wife, that, at extremity,
Some crisis brought about by fire and flame,
The patient frenzy-stung must needs break loose,
Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,
Even in the arms of who should front her first,
No monster but a man—while nature shrieked
"Or thus escape, or die!" The spasm arrived,
Not the escape by way of sin,—O God,
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy hand?
Therefore she lay resigned to die,—so far
The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,
Craft to the rescue, let craft supplement
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece!
Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue,
Unmanly simulation of a sin,
With place and time and circumstance to suit—
These letters false beyond all forgery—
Not just handwriting and mere authorship,
But false to body and soul they figure forth—
As though the man had cut out shape and shape
From fancies of that other Aretine,[1]
To paste below—incorporate the filth
With cherub faces on a missal-page!

Whereby the man so far attains his end
That strange temptation is permitted,—see!
Pompilia wife, and Caponsacchi priest,
Are brought together as nor priest nor wife
Should stand, and there is passion in the place,
Power in the air for evil as for good,
Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.
No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,
No tablet signalize the terrace, teach
New generations which succeed the old
The pavement of the street is holy ground;
No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed
And Satan fell like lightning! Why repine?
What does the world, told truth, but lie the more?

A second time the plot is foiled; nor, now,
By corresponding sin for countercheck,
No wile and trick that baffle trick and wile,—
The play o' the parents! Here the blot is blanched
By God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution, ermine-like
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow.
Such was this gift of God who showed for once
How He would have the world go white: it seems
As a new attribute were born of each
Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise,—
As a new safeguard sprang up in defence
Of their new noble nature: so a thorn
Comes to the aid of and completes the rose—
Courage to-wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,
I' the crisis; might leaps vindicating right.
See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold,
With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,
Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat
In a byeway,—how fares he when face to face
With Caponsacchi? Who fights, who fears now?
There quails Count Guido armed to the chattering teeth,

[1] *That other Aretine:* Pietro Aretino, author of various obscene writings.

Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word
O' the Canon of the Pieve! There skulks crime
Behind law called in to back cowardice:
While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
Springs up a serpent!

But anon of these.
Him I judge now,—of him proceed to note,
Failing the first, a second chance befriends
Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.
The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates,
Nor does amiss i' the main,—secludes the wife
From the husband, respites the oppressed one, grants
Probation to the oppressor, could he know
The mercy of a minute's fiery purge!
The furnace-coals alike of public scorn,
Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,
What if,—the force and guile, the ore's alloy,
Eliminate, his baser soul refined—
The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire?
Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days
And, when no graver musings claim their due,
Meditate on a man's immense mistake
Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns crawl—
Takes the unmanly means—ay, though to ends
Man scarce should make for, would but reach thro' wrong,—
May sin, but nowise needs shame manhood so:
Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,
And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport
In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido? Why, the fraudful trap—
Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet
Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play—
Here he picks up its fragments to the least,
Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place
Where haply he may patch again, refit
The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,
Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the bone.
Craft, greed and violence complot revenge:
Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about
And seize occasion and be safe withal:
Greed craves its act may work both far and near,
Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root, beside.
Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak
Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,
And drop down one more gold piece in the path:
Violence stipulates "Advantage proved
"And safety sure, be pain the overplus!
"Murder with jagged knife! Cut but tear too!
"Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends!"
And what, craft's scheme? scheme sorrowful and strange
As though the elements, whom mercy checked,
Had mustered hate for one eruption more,
One final deluge to surprise the Ark
Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top:
Their outbreak-signal—what but the dove's coo,
Back with the olive in her bill for news
Sorrow was over? 'Tis an infant's birth,
Guido's first born, his son and heir, that gives
The occasion: other men cut free their souls
From care in such a case, fly up in thanks
To God, reach, recognize His love for once:
Guido cries "Soul, at last the mire is thine!
"Lie there in likeness of a money-bag
"My babe's birth so pins down past moving now,
"That I dare cut adrift the lives I late
"Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them!
"These parents and their child my wife,—touch one,
"Lose all! Their rights determined on a head
"I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair
"Dangled a hope for me: now—chance and change!
"No right was in their child but passes plain
"To that child's child and through such child to me.
"I am a father now,—come what, come will,

"I represent my child; he comes between—
"Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life
"From those three: why, the gold is in his curls!
"Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,
"Not his grey horror, her more hideous black—
"Go these, devoted to the knife!"
'Tis done:
Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate?
He calls to counsel, fashions certain four
Colourless natures counted clean till now,
—Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth,
Ignorant virtue! Here's the gold o' the prime
When Saturn ruled, shall shock our leaden day—
The clown abash the courtier! Mark it, bards!
The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,
Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price,—
Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself,
Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now
I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break
And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's birth-night-eve!
Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!
"To man, good will!"—such peace finds earth to-day!
After the seventeen hundred years, so man
Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete
His murder! what is it I said?—cuts loose
Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling,
Simply because each served to nail secure,
By a corner of the money-bag, his soul,—
Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath
O'erweights them in the balance,—off they fly!

So is the murder managed, sin conceived
To the full: and why not crowned with triumph too?
Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth death?
I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape,
Impunity and the thing supposed success,
Guido is found when the check comes, the change,
The monitory touch o' the tether—felt
By few, not marked by many, named by none
At the moment, only recognized aright
I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin
Exceed the service, leap the line: such check—
A secret which this life finds hard to keep,
And, often guessed, is never quite revealed—
Needs must trip Guido on a stumbling-block
Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path!
Study this single oversight of care,
This hebetude that marred sagacity,
Forgetfulness of all the man best knew,—
How any stranger having need to fly,
Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.
Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,
Get horses, you must show the warrant, just
The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,
Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—
And straight authority will back demand,
Give you the pick o' the post-house!—how should he,
Then, resident at Rome for thirty years,
Guido, instruct a stranger! And himself
Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith
Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide
To save him: horsed and manned, with such advance
O' the hunt behind, why, 'twere the easy task
Of hours told on the fingers of one hand,
To reach the Tuscan frontier, laugh at-home,
Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—
Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that
Satire upon a sentence just pronounced
By the Rota and confirmed by the Grand-duke,—
Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
The Pope-King and the populace of priests
Made common cause with their confederate
The other priestling who seduced his wife,
He, all unaided, wiped out the affront

With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale
Missed such applause, and by such oversight!
So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five
Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,
The few permissible miles, to sink at length,
Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw,
As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the wave,
—Each swine, the devil inside him: so slept they,
And so were caught and caged—all through one trip,
One touch of fool in Guido the astute!
He curses the omission, I surmise,
More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind,
It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate,
Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt,—but how?
On the edge o' the precipice! One minute more,
Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son,
Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath!
Thy comrades each and all were of one mind,
Thy murder done, to straightway murder thee
In turn, because of promised pay withheld.
So, to the last, greed found itself at odds
With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror,
Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes
Huddling together in the cave they call
Their palace outraged day thus penetrates.
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs
O' the mage and master, I detect each shape
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less,
All alike coloured, all descried akin
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred
At the centre: see, they lick the master's hand,—
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate, — why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,
This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page—and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch!
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge;
Paul is past reach in this world and my time:
That is a case reserved. Pass to the next,
The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo
Priest, Canon, and what more? nor wolf nor fox,
But hybrid, neither craft nor violence
Wholly, part violence part craft: such cross
Tempts speculation—will both blend one day,
And prove hell's better product? Or subside
And let the simple quality emerge,
Go on with Satan's service the old way?
Meanwhile, what promise,—what performance too!
For there's a new distinctive touch, I see,
Lust—lacking in the two—hell's own blue tint
That gives a character and marks the man
More than a match for yellow and red. Once more,
A case reserved: why should I doubt? Then comes
The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke,

The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
No gesture to curb cruelty a whit
More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome whelps
Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,
Flat in the covert! How should she but couch,
Lick the dry lips, unsheath the blunted claw,
Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
Born when herself was novice to the taste,
The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last,
These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,
These four companions,—country-folk this time,
Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
Much less the curse o' the Court! Mere striplings too,
Fit to do human nature justice still!
Surely when impudence in Guido's shape
Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth
To these stout tall rough bright-eyed black-haired boys,
The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek
Before the indignant outcry break from lip!
Are these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed
From healthy autumn-finish of ploughed glebe,
Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,
And winter near with rest and Christmas play?
How greet they Guido with his final task—
(As if he but proposed "One vineyard more
"To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed!")
"Anywhere, anyhow and anywhy,
"Murder me some three people, old and young,
"Ye never heard the names of,—and be paid
"So much!" And the whole four accede at once.
Demur? Do cattle bidden march or halt?
Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith
I' the lord o' the land, instructs them,—birth-right badge
Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again?
Not so at all, thou noble human heart!
All is done purely for the pay,—which, earned,
And not forthcoming at the instant, makes
Religion heresy, and the lord o' the land
Fit subject for a murder in his turn.
The patron with cut throat and rifled purse,
Deposited i' the roadside-ditch, his due,
Nought hinders each good fellow trudging home,
The heavier by a piece or two in poke,
And so with new zest to the common life,
Mattock and spade, plough-tail and waggon-shaft,
Till some such other piece of luck betide,
Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.
Nay, more i' the background yet? Unnoticed forms
Claim to be classed, subordinately vile?
Complacent lookers-on that laugh,—perchance
Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough
With the mere child he manages amiss—
But would not interfere and make bad worse
For twice the fractious tears and prayers: thou know'st
Civility better, Marzi-Medici,
Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke!
Fit representative of law, man's lamp
I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rush-light-end
Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest!
Whose answer to the couple's cry for help
Is a threat,—whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,
A shrug o' the shoulder, and facetious word
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,
To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law!

The wife is pushed back to the husband, he
Who knows how these home-squabblings persecute
People who have the public good to mind,
And work best with a silence in the court!

Ah, but I save my word at least for thee,
Archbishop, who art under me i' the Church,
As I am under God,—thou, chosen by both
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep—
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot
While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?
With thee at least anon the little word!

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round
And heat the furnace sevenfold: time indeed
A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,
Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,
The main offender, scar and brand the rest
Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole: then flood
And purify the scene with outside day—
Which yet, in the absolutest drench of dark,
Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
To the despair of hell.

First of the first,
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
Perfect in whiteness: stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—
Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb,
Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere
I see in the world the intellect of man,
That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
It was not given Pompilia to know much,
Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
Be memorized by who records my time.
Yet if in purity and patience, if
In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
Safe like the signet stone with the new name
That saints are known by,—if in right returned
For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
If there be any virtue, any praise,—
Then will this woman-child have proved—who knows?—
Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,
I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure
All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:
At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still
(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)
Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
To mellow in the morning, those made fat
By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
Uncertain bud, as product of his pains!
While—see how this mere chance-sown cleft-nursed seed
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,
My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
That having been obedient to the end
According to the light allotted, law
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test,—
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
Submissive next to the bad husband,—nay,
Tolerant of those meaner miserable
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain,—
Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,

The old to the new, promoted at one cry
O' the trump of God to the new service, not
To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
Sublime in new impatience with the foe!
Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
On neck of man, tread man into the hell
Meet for him, and obey God all the more!
Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
When it seemed only thine to keep or lose,
How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
"Value life, and preserve life for My sake!"
Thou didst . . . how shall I say? . . . receive so long
The standing ordinance of God on earth,
What wonder if the novel claim had clashed
With old requirement, seemed to supersede
Too much the customary law? But, brave,
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
Accept the obligation laid on thee,
Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
And flower o' the field, all in a common pact
To worthily defend the trust of trusts,
Life from the Ever Living:—didst resist—
Anticipate the office that is mine—
And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,
The endeavour of the wicked, and defend
Him who,—again in my default,—was there
For visible providence: one less true than thou
To touch, i' the past, less practised in the right,
Approved less far in all docility
To all instruction,—how had such an one
Made scruple "Is this motion a decree?"
It was authentic to the experienced ear
O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may!

And surely not so very much apart
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest,—in whom
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,
We grave to imitate God's miracle,
Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree?
Irregular noble 'scapegrace—son the same!
Faulty—and peradventure ours the fault
Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line,
Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,
Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,
And bind him for our maidens! Better bear
The King of Pride go wantoning awhile,
Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,
Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,
Churning the blackness hoary: He who made
The comely terror, He shall make the sword
To match that piece of netherstone his heart,
Ay, nor miss praise thereby; who else shut fire
I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke,
In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry
That dares the right and disregards alike
The yea and nay o' the world? Self-sacrifice,—
What if an idol took it? Ask the Church
Why she was wont to turn each Venus here,—
Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite
Instruction, for the sake of purblind love,—
Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit
Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude!
All this sweet savour was not ours but thine,
Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name
Incense, and treasure up as food for saints,
When flung to us—whose function was to give
Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile?
Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,
Blameworthy, punishable in this freak
Of thine, this youth prolonged, though age was ripe,
This masquerade in sober day, with change
Of motley too,—now hypocrite's disguise,
Now fool's-costume: which lie was least like truth,
Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb

With that symmetric soul inside my son,
The churchman's or the worldling's,—let him judge,
Our adversary who enjoys the task!
I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—
When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts,—made bare
My athlete on the instant, gave such good
Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.
There may have been rash stripping—every rag
Went to the winds,—infringement manifold
Of laws prescribed pudicity, I fear,
In this impulsive and prompt self-display!
Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth;
Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect
No veritable star swims out of cloud.
Bear thou such imputation, undergo
The penalty I nowise dare relax,—
Conventional chastisement and rebuke.
But for the outcome, the brave starry birth
Conciliating earth with all that cloud,
Thank heaven as I do! Ay, such champion-ship
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
The challenge of the false knight,—watch we long
And wait we vainly for its gallant like
From those appointed to the service, sworn
His body-guard with pay and privilege—
White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,
Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,
Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs!
Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat?
Aloof, bewraying their attire: whilst thou
In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
Sprang'st forth the hero! In thought, word and deed,
How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
I find it easy to believe: and if
At any fateful moment of the strange
Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,
Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much,—
As when a thundrous midnight, with black air
That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,
Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed
Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides
Immensity of sweetness,—so, perchance,
Might the surprise and fear release too much
The perfect beauty of the body and soul
Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
He who is Pity. Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph? Pray
"Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!"
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise!
Do I not see the praise?—that while thy mates
Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need
Unprofitable through the very pains
We gave to train them well and start them fair,—
Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,
For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
Of ear, through iteration of command,
For catching quick the sense of the real cry,—
Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,
Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
Be glad thou hast let light into the world
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—see

The same upon thy path and march assured,
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminate,
Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!

And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,
Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
Makeshift, starved samples of humanity!
Father and mother, huddle there and hide!
A gracious eye may find you! Foul and fair,
Sadly mixed natures: self-indulgent,—yet
Self-sacrificing too: how the love soars,
How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite
Sink again! So they keep the middle course,
Slide into silly crime at unaware,
Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope
And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death,
Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what waits
The ambiguous creature,—how the one black tuft
Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well
As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast!
Nay, you were punished in the very part
That looked most pure of speck,—'twas honest love
Betrayed you,—did love seem most worthy pains,
Challenge such purging, since ordained survive
When all the rest of you was done with? Go!
Never again elude the choice of tints!
White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:
Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some
Grouped for my judgment now,—profess no doubt
While I pronounce: dark, difficult enough
The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
As a mere man may, with no special touch
O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb:

Nay, if the popular notion class me right,
One of well-nigh decayed intelligence,—
What of that? Through hard labour and good will,
And habitude that gives a blind man sight
At the practised finger-ends of him, I do
Discern, and dare decree in consequence,
Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill,—cloud-like,
This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
Suspected in the skies I nightly scan?
What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring
Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
And mass o' the whole man's-strength,—conglobed so late—
Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work?
While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world,
For this life recognize and arbitrate,
Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,
Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"
Candle in hand that helps me and to spare,—
What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry!
"Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!
"Play the good householder, ply man and maid
"With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test
"Their work and nowise stint of the due wage
"Each worthy worker: but with gyves and whip
"Pay thou misprision of a single point
"Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,
"Lament'st the darkling,—bold to all beneath!
"What if thyself adventure, now the place
"Is purged so well? Leave pavement and mount roof,
"Look round thee for the light of the upper sky,
"The fire which lit thy fire which finds default
"In Guido Franceschini to his cost!
"What if, above in the domain of light,
"Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse?
"Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid,—
"Steady in thy superb prerogative,

"Thy inch of inkling,—nor once face the doubt
"I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt?"

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun;
Thither I sent the great looks which compel
Light from its fount: all that I do and am
Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,
Remembered or divined, as mere man may:
I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know,
I speak,—what should I know, then, and how speak
Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain
As to recorded governance above?
If my own breath, only, blew coal alight
I styled celestial and the morning-star?
I, who in this world act resolvedly,
Dispose of men, their bodies and their souls,
As they acknowledge or gainsay the light
I show them,—shall I too lack courage?—leave
I, too, the post of me, like those I blame?
Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,
To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
I am near the end; but still not at the end;
All to the very end is trial in life:
At this stage is the trial of my soul
Danger to face, or danger to refuse?
Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?

O Thou,—as represented here to me
In such conception as my soul allows,—
Under Thy measureless, my atom width!—
Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
Picked out of the immensity of sky,
To re-unite there, be our heaven for earth,
Our known unknown, our God revealed to man?
Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole;
Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense,—
There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus!)
In the absolute immensity, the whole
Appreciable solely by Thyself,—
Here, by the little mind of man, reduced
To littleness that suits his faculty,
In the degree appreciable too;
Between Thee and ourselves—nay even, again,
Below us, to the extreme of the minute,
Appreciable by how many and what diverse
Modes of the life Thou madest be! (why live
Except for love,—how love unless they know?)
Each of them, only filling to the edge,
Insect or angel, his just length and breadth,
Due facet of reflection,—full, no less,
Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things.
I it is who have been appointed here
To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,
Just as, if new philosophy know aught,
This one earth, out of all the multitude
Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed,—
Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,
For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act
Beside which even the creation fades
Into a puny exercise of power.
Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,
Both emanate alike from Thy dread play
Of operation outside this our sphere
Where things are classed and counted small or great,—
Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine!
I therefore bow my head and take Thy place
There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
In the world's mouth, which I find credible:
I love it with my heart: unsatisfied,
I try it with my reason, nor discept
From any point I probe and pronounce sound.
Mind is not matter nor from matter, but
Above,—leave matter then, proceed with mind!
Man's be the mind recognized at the height,—
Leave the inferior minds and look at man!
Is he the strong, intelligent and good
Up to his own conceivable height? Nowise.
Enough o' the low,—soar the conceivable height,
Find cause to match the effect in evidence,
The work i' the world, not man's but God's; leave man!

Conjecture of the worker by the work:
Is there strength there?—enough: intelligence?
Ample: but goodness in a like degree?
Not to the human eye in the present state,
An isoscele deficient in the base.[1]
What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
But just the instance which this tale supplies
Of love without a limit? So is strength,
So is intelligence; let love be so,
Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,
Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands:
I can believe this dread machinery
Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,
Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure
Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,
By new machinery in counterpart,
The moral qualities of man—how else?—
To make him love in turn and be beloved,
Creative and self-sacrificing too,
And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
"I have said ye are Gods,"—shall it be said for nought?)
Enable man to wring, from out all pain,
All pleasure for a common heritage
To all eternity: this may be surmised,
The other is revealed,—whether a fact,
Absolute, abstract, independent truth,
Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind,—
Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye,—
The same and not the same, else unconceived—
Though quite conceivable to the next grade
Above it in intelligence,—as truth
Easy to man were blindness to the beast
By parity of procedure,—the same truth
In a new form, but changed in either case:
What matter so intelligence be filled?
To a child, the sea is angry, for it roars:
Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face?
Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,
Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law,—
To man and child remains the same effect
On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause
Never so thoroughly: so my heart be struck,
What care I,—by God's gloved hand or the bare?
Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,
Dubious in the transmitting of the tale,—
No, nor with certain riddles set to solve.
This life is training and a passage; pass,—
Still, we march over some flat obstacle
We made give way before us; solid truth
In front of it, what motion for the world?
The moral sense grows but by exercise.
'Tis even as man grew probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds,
Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Deal
Thus with the present problem: as we see,
A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin
Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.
Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance
Of inquisition after blood, we see
Pompilia lost and Guido saved: how long?
For his whole life: how much is that whole life?
We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,
And feel that life is large and the world small,
So, wait till life have passed from out the world.
Neither does this astonish at the end,
That whereas I can so receive and trust,
Other men, made with hearts and souls the same,
Reject and disbelieve,—subordinate
The future to the present,—sin, nor fear.
This I refer still to the foremost fact,
Life is probation and the earth no goal
But starting-point of man: compel him strive,

[1] *An isoscele deficient in the base:* two sides of the triangle, strength and intelligence, are visible; the third, goodness, is not so in the present state of our knowledge.

Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal,—
Why institute that race, his life, at all?
But this does overwhelm me with surprise,
Touch me to terror,—not that faith, the pearl,
Should be let lie by fishers wanting food,—
Nor, seen and handled by a certain few
Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned
To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves,—
But that, when haply found and known and named
By the residue made rich for evermore,
These,—that these favoured ones, should in a trice
Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,
Mud-worms that make the savoury soup! Enough
O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few!
How do the Christians here deport them, keep
Their robes of white unspotted by the world?
What is this Aretine Archbishop, this
Man under me as I am under God,
This champion of the faith, I armed and decked,
Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,
To show the enemy his victor,—see!
What's the best fighting when the couple close?
Pompilia cries, "Protect me from the wolf!"
He—"No, thy Guido is rough, heady, strong,
"Dangerous to disquiet: let him bide!
"He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse
"The darkness of his den with: so, the fawn
"Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies,
"—Come to me, daughter!—thus I throw him back!"
Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,
Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,
Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,
Made an archbishop and undone a saint?
Well, then, descend these heights, this pride of life,
Sit in the ashes with a barefoot monk
Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks,
By fasting, watching, stone cell and wire scourge,
—No such indulgence as unknits the strength—
These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle,
And the world's praise or blame runs rillet-wise
Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know!
He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world,
And shudders to the marrow. "Save this child?
"Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop's self!
"Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark
"His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?
"Great ones could help yet help not: why should small?
"I break my promise: let her break her heart!"
These are the Christians not the worldlings, not
The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith!
If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,
What wonder? But, this time, the wise that watch,
Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine,
The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here.
To our last resource, then! Since all flesh is weak,
Bind weaknesses together, we get strength:
The individual weighed, found wanting, try
Some institution, honest artifice
Whereby the units grow compact and firm!
Each props the other, and so stand is made
By our embodied cowards that grow brave.
The Monastery called of Convertites,
Meant to help women because these helped Christ,—
A thing existent only while it acts,
Does as designed, else a nonentity,—
For what is an idea unrealized?—
Pompilia is consigned to these for help.

They do help: they are prompt to testify
To her pure life and saintly dying days.
She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich.
What does the body that lives through helpfulness
To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
The dove's note changes to the crow's cry: judge!
"Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
"What goods belong to those we succour, be
"The same proved women of dishonest life,—
"And seeing that this Trial made appear
"Pompilia was in such predicament,—
"The Convent hereupon pretends to said
"Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
"And takes possession by the Fisc's advice."
Such is their attestation to the cause
Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped:
But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse
To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat?
Christ must give up his gains then! They unsay
All the fine speeches, — who was saint is whore.
Why, scripture yields no parallel for this!
The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat;
We want another legend of the Twelve
Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,
Claiming as prize the woof of price—for why?
The Master was a thief, purloined the same,
Or paid for it out of the common bag!
Can it be this is end and outcome, all
I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
The best yield of the latest time, this year
The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man?
Is such effect proportionate to cause?
And still the terror keeps on the increase
When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact?
That the fault, the obduracy to good,
Lies not with the impracticable stuff
Whence man is made, his very nature's fault,
As if it were of ice the moon may gild
Not melt, or stone 'twas meant the sun should warm
Not make bear flowers,—nor ice nor stone to blame:
But it can melt, that ice, can bloom, that stone,
Impassible to rule of day and night!
This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,
Whatever love and faith we looked should spring
At advent of the authoritative star,
Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source,—
These have leapt forth profusely in old time,
These still respond with promptitude to-day,
At challenge of — what unacknowledged powers
O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth
By law, and light by rule should supersede?
For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung
At the first summons,—"Help for honour's sake,
"Play the man, pity the oppressed!"—no pause,
How does he lay about him in the midst,
Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk,
All blindness, bravery and obedience!—blind?
Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
Delirious with the plenitude of light
Should interfuse him to the finger-ends—
Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong?
Where are the Christians in their panoply?
The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts
Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,
The helmet of salvation, and that sword
O' the Spirit, even the word of God,—where these?
Slunk into corners! Oh, I hear at once
Hubbub of protestation! "What, we monks
"We friars, of such an order, such a rule,
"Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark

"At every point along the boundary-line
"'Twixt true and false, religion and the world,
"Where this or the other dogma of our Church
"Called for defence?" And I, despite myself,
How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,
"Or better than the best, or nothing serves!
"What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight
"With such another doughtiness to match,
"Done at an instinct of the natural man?"
Immolate body, sacrifice soul too,—
Do not these publicans the same? Outstrip!
Or else stop race you boast runs neck and neck,
You with the wings, they with the feet,—for shame!
Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal!
Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,
"Help thou, or Christendom is done to death!"
Five years since, in the Province of To-kien,
Which is in China as some people know,
Maigrot, my Vicar Apostolic there,
Having a great qualm, issues a decree.
Alack, the converts use as God's name, not *Tien-chu* but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*,
As Jesuits please to fancy politic,
While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire,—
For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme prince,
While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven: all cry,
"There is no business urgent for despatch
"As that thou send a legate, specially
"Cardinal Tournon, straight to Pekin, there
"To settle and compose the difference!"
So have I seen a potentate all fume
For some infringement of his realm's just right,
Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm
O' the frontier; while inside the mainland lie,
Quite undisputed-for in solitude,
Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap:
What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach,
While he looks on sublimely at his ease?
How does their ruin touch the empire's bound?

And is this little all that was to be?
Where is the gloriously-decisive change,
Metamorphosis the immeasurable
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
Should, in some poor sort, justify its price?
Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross[1]
Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,
Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
By the old smelting-process years ago?
If this were sad to see in just the sage
Who should profess so much, perform no more,
What is it when suspected in that Power
Who undertook to make and made the world,
Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
Well, is the thing we see, salvation?

I

Put no such dreadful question to myself,
Within whose circle of experience burns
The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,—God:
I must outlive a thing ere know it dead:
When I outlive the faith there is a sun,
When I lie, ashes to the very soul,—
Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,
"He died in dark whence never morn arose."
While I see day succeed the deepest night—
How can I speak but as I know?—my speech
Must be, throughout the darkness, "It will end:
"The light that did burn, will burn!"
Clouds obscure—
But for which obscuration all were bright?
Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffused,
A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,—
Better the very clarity of heaven:

[1] *An adept of the Rosy Cross:* a member of the society of Rosicrucians.

The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.
What but the weakness in a faith supplies
The incentive to humanity, no strength
Absolute, irresistible, comports?
How can man love but what he yearns to help?
And that which men think weakness within strength,
But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
What were it else but the first things made new,
But repetition of the miracle,
The divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends and aye begins for man?
So, never I miss footing in the maze,
No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all.

But are mankind not real, who pace outside
My petty circle, world that's measured me?
And when they stumble even as I stand,
Have I a right to stop ear when they cry,
As they were phantoms who took clouds for crags,
Tripped and fell, where man's march might safely move?
Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's,
When out of the old time there pleads some bard,
Philosopher, or both,[1] and—whispers not,
But words it boldly. "The inward work and worth
"Of any mind, what other mind may judge
"Save God who only knows the thing He made,
"The veritable service He exacts?
"It is the outward product men appraise.
"Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft:
"'I looked that it should move the mountain too!'
"Or else 'Had just a turret toppled down,
"'Success enough!'—may say the Machinist
"Who knows what less or more result might be:
"But we, who see that done we cannot do,
"'A feat beyond man's force,' we men must say.
"Regard me and that shake I gave the world!
"I was born, not so long before Christ's birth
"As Christ's birth haply did precede thy day,—
"But many a watch before the star of dawn:
"Therefore I lived,—it is thy creed affirms,
"Pope Innocent, who art to answer me!—
"Under conditions, nowise to escape,
"Whereby salvation was impossible.
"Each impulse to achieve the good and fair,
"Each aspiration to the pure and true,
"Being without a warrant or an aim,
"Was just as sterile a felicity
"As if the insect, born to spend his life
"Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe
"(Painfully motionless in the mid-air)
"Some word of weighty counsel for man's sake,
"Some 'Know thyself' or 'Take the golden mean!'[2]
"—Forwent his happy dance and the glad ray,
"Died half an hour the sooner and was dust.
"I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse,
"Why not live brutishly, obey brutes' law?
"But I, of body as of soul complete,
"A gymnast at the games, philosopher
"I' the schools, who painted, and made music,—all
"Glories that met upon the tragic stage
"When the Third Poet's[3] tread surprised the Two,—
"Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
"And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
"I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
"Adopted virtue as my rule of life,

[1] *Some bard, philosopher, or both:* the following speech is put into the mouth of Euripides.

[2] *Some "Know thyself" or "Take the golden mean":* typical apophthegms of the ancient Greek sages.

[3] *The Third Poet:* Euripides. *The Two:* Æschylus and Sophocles.

"Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
"And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,
"And have been teaching now two thousand years.
"Witness my work,—plays that should please, forsooth!
"'They might please, they may displease, they shall teach,
"'For truth's sake,' so I said, and did, and do.
"Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix heard,—
"How much of temperance and righteousness,
"Judgment to come, did I find reason for,
"Corroborate with my strong style that spared
"No sin, nor swerved the more from branding brow
"Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?
"How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?
"How closely come, in what I represent
"As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank?
"And as that limner not untruly limns
"Who draws an object round or square, which square
"Or round seems to the unassisted eye,
"Though Galileo's tube display the same
"Oval or oblong,—so, who controverts
"I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought
"Beside Paul's picture? Mine was true for me.
"I saw that there are, first and above all,
"The hidden forces, blind necessities,
"Named Nature, but the thing's self unconceived:
"Then follow,—how dependent upon these,
"We know not, how imposed above ourselves,
"We well know,—what I name the gods, a power
"Various or one: for great and strong and good
"Is there, and little, weak and bad there too,
"Wisdom and folly: say, these make no God,—
"What is it else that rules outside man's self?
"A fact then,—always, to the naked eye,—
"And so, the one revealment possible
"Of what were unimagined else by man.
"Therefore, what gods do, man may criticize,
"Applaud, condemn,—how should he fear the truth?—
"But likewise have in awe because of power,
"Venerate for the main munificence,
"And give the doubtful deed its due excuse
"From the acknowledged creature of a day
"To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold
"Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,
"Most assured on what now concerns him most—
"The law of his own life, the path he prints,—
"Which law is virtue and not vice, I say,—
"And least inquisitive where search least skills,
"I' the nature we best give the clouds to keep.
"What could I paint beyond a scheme like this
"Out of the fragmentary truths where light
"Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
"You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
"Shoots life and substance into death and void;
"Themselves compose the whole we made before:
"The forces and necessity grow God,—
"The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,
"Prove just His operation manifold
"And multiform, translated, as must be,
"Into intelligible shape so far
"As suits our sense and sets us free to feel.
"What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
"That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
"Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?
"The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same:
"Lightning's cause comprehends nor man nor child.
"Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge broke,
"Presently re-adjusts itself, the small
"Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named new:

"So much, no more two thousand years have done!
"Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me,
"For not descrying sunshine at midnight,
"Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far—
"While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,
"Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon,—
"Though just a word from that strong style of mine,
"Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-staff,
"Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,
"That mire of cowardice and slush of lies
"Wherein I find them wallow in wide day!"

How should I answer this Euripides?
Paul,—'tis a legend,—answered Seneca,[1]
But that was in the day-spring; noon is now:
We have got too familiar with the light.
Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn?
When the whole truth-touched man burned up, one fire?
—Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet,
Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend
Wings to that conflagration of the world
Which Christ awaits ere He makes all things new:
So should the frail become the perfect, rapt
From glory of pain to glory of joy; and so,
Even in the end,—the act renouncing earth,
Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children here,—
Begin that other act which finds all, lost,
Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold,
And, in the next time, feels the finite love
Blent and embalmed with the eternal life.
So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink
In those north parts, lean all but out of life,
Desist a dread mere breathing-stop, then slow
Re-assert day, begin the endless rise.
Was this too easy for our after-stage?
Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,
Only allowed initiate, set man's step
In the true way by help of the great glow?
A way wherein it is ordained he walk,
Bearing to see the light from heaven still more
And more encroached on by the light of earth,
Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven,
Earthly incitements that mankind serve God
For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's.
Till at last, who distinguishes the sun
From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?
More praise to him who with his subtle prism
Shall decompose both beams and name the true.
In such sense, who is last proves first indeed;
For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth
Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now?
Who untwists heaven's white from the yellow flare
O' the world's gross torch, without night's foil that helped
Produce the Christian act so possible
When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,—
So hard now when the world smiles "Right and wise!
"Faith points the politic, the thrifty way,
"Will make who plods it in the end returns
"Beyond mere fool's-sport and improvidence.
"We fools dance thro' the cornfield of this life,
"Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,
"—Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf under-foot,
"To get the better at some poppy-flower,—
"Well aware we shall have so much less wheat
"In the eventual harvest: you meantime
"Waste not a spike,—the richlier will you reap!
"What then? There will be always garnered meal
"Sufficient for our comfortable loaf,
"While you enjoy the undiminished sack!"
Is it not this ignoble confidence,
Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,
Makes the old heroism impossible?

[1] *Paul . . . answered Seneca:* referring to the traditional (but legendary) intercourse between St. Paul and Seneca.

Unless . . . what whispers me of times to come?
What if it be the mission of that age
My death will usher into life, to shake
This torpor of assurance from our creed,
Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring
That formidable danger back, we drove
Long ago to the distance and the dark?
No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp:
We have built wall and sleep in city safe:
But if some earthquake try the towers that laugh
To think they once saw lions rule outside,
And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
Prepared to die,—which means, alive at last?
As we broke up that old faith of the world,
Have we, next age, to break up this the new—
Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report—
Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
Through increased faith i' the thing reports belie?
Must we deny,—do they, these Molinists,
At peril of their body and their soul,—
Recognized truths, obedient to some truth
Unrecognized yet, but perceptible?—
Correct the portrait by the living face,
Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?
Then, for the few that rise to the new height,
The many that must sink to the old depth,
The multitude found fall away! A few,
E'en ere new law speak clear, may keep the old,
Preserve the Christian level, call good good
And evil evil, (even though razed and blank
The old titles,) helped by custom, habitude,
And all else they mistake for finer sense
O' the fact that reason warrants,—as before,
They hope perhaps, fear not impossibly.
At least some one Pompilia left the world
Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel,
"I took it and tread firm there; wherefore change?"
But what a multitude will surely fall
Quite through the crumbling truth, late subjacent,
Sink to the next discoverable base,
Rest upon human nature, settle there
On what is firm, the lust and pride of life!
A mass of men, whose very souls even now
Seem to need re-creating,—so they slink
Worm-like into the mud, light now lays bare,—
Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes
And whisper—"They are grafted, barren twigs,
"Into the living stock of Christ: may bear
"One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead,"—
Those who with all the aid of Christ succumb,
How, without Christ, shall they, unaided, sink?
Whither but to this gulf before my eyes?
Do not we end, the century and I?
The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe
O' the very masque's self it will mock,—on me,
Last lingering personage, the impatient mime
Pushes already,—will I block the way?
Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space
For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet?
Here comes the first experimentalist
In the new order of things,—he plays a priest;
Does he take inspiration from the Church,
Directly make her rule his law of life?
Not he: his own mere impulse guides the man—
Happily sometimes, since ourselves allow
He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main
The right step through the maze we bade him foot.
But if his heart had prompted him break loose
And mar the measure? Why, we must submit,
And thank the chance that brought him safe so far.
Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps.
Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
Show why this step was right while that were wrong?
How should he? "Ask your hearts as I asked mine,
"And get discreetly through the morrice too;
"If your hearts misdirect you,—quit the stage,
"And make amends,—be there amends to make!"
Such is, for the Augustin that was once,
This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.

"But my heart answers to another tune,"
Puts in the Abate, second in the suite,
"I have my taste too, and tread no such step!
"You choose the glorious life, and may, for me!
"I like the lowest of life's appetites,—
"So you judge,—but the very truth of joy
"To my own apprehension which decides.
"Call me knave and you get yourself called fool!
"I live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge;
"Attain these ends by force, guile: hypocrite,
"To-day, perchance to-morrow recognized
"The rational man, the type of common sense."
There's Loyola[1] adapted to our time!
Under such guidance Guido plays his part,
He also influencing in the due turn
These last clods where I track intelligence
By any glimmer, these four at his beck
Ready to murder any, and, at their own,
As ready to murder him,—such make the world!
And, first effect of the new cause of things,
There they lie also duly,—the old pair
Of the weak head and not so wicked heart,
With the one Christian mother, wife and girl,
—Which three gifts seem to make an angel up,—
The world's first foot o' the dance is on their heads!
Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close
On the exit: and my last act, as my first,
I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus
With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
With my whole strength once more, ere end my part,
Ending, so far as man may, this offence.
And when I raise my arm, who plucks my sleeve?
Who stops me in the righteous function,—foe
Or friend? Oh, still as ever, friends are they
Who, in the interest of outraged truth
Deprecate such rough handling of a lie!
The facts being proved and incontestable,
What is the last word I must listen to?
Perchance—"Spare yet a term this barren stock
"We pray thee dig about and dung and dress
"Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet!"
Perchance—"So poor and swift a punishment
"Shall throw him out of life with all that sin:
"Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain
"Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else!"
Nowise! Remonstrants on each side commence
Instructing, there's a new tribunal now
Higher than God's—the educated man's!
Nice sense of honour in the human breast
Supersedes here the old coarse oracle—
Confirming none the less a point or so
Wherein blind predecessors worked aright
By rule of thumb: as when Christ said,—when, where?
Enough, I find it pleaded in a place,—
"All other wrongs done, patiently I take:
"But touch my honour and the case is changed!
"I feel the due resentment,—*nemini*
"*Honorem trado*[2] is my quick retort."
Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day!
Still, should the old authority be mute
Or doubtful or in speaking clash with new,
The younger takes permission to decide.
At last we have the instinct of the world
Ruling its household without tutelage:
And while the two laws, human and divine,
Have busied finger with this tangled case,
In pushes the brisk junior, cuts the knot,
Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips
Silverly o'er the tongue! "Remit the death!
"Forgive, . . . well, in the old way, if thou please,
"Decency and the relics of routine
"Respected,—let the Count go free as air!
"Since he may plead a priest's immunity,—

[1] *Loyola:* Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), founder of the order of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits.

[2] *Nemini honorem trado:* "my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah xlii. 8).

"The minor orders help enough for that,
"With Farinacci's licence,—who decides
"That the mere implication of such man,
"So privileged, in any cause, before
"Whatever Court except the Spiritual,
"Straight quashes law-procedure,—quash it, then!
"Remains a pretty loophole of escape
"Moreover, that, beside the patent fact
"O' the law's allowance, there's involved the weal
"O' the Popedom: a son's privilege at stake,
"Thou wilt pretend the Church's interest,
"Ignore all finer reasons to forgive!
"But herein lies the crowning cogency—
"(Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads)
"That in this case the spirit of culture speaks,
"Civilization is imperative.
"To her shall we remand all delicate points
"Henceforth, nor take irregular advice
"O' the sly, as heretofore: she used to hint
"Remonstrances, when law was out of sorts
"Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,
"An eye that roved was cured of arrogance:
"But why be forced to mumble under breath
"What soon shall be acknowledged as plain fact,
"Outspoken, say, in thy successor's time?
"Methinks we see the golden age return!
"Civilization and the Emperor
"Succeed to Christianity and Pope.
"One Emperor then, as one Pope now: meanwhile,
"Anticipate a little! We tell thee 'Take
"'Guido's life, sapped society shall crash,
"'Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall be
"'—Supremacy of husband over wife!'
"Does the man rule i' the house, and may his mate
"Because of any plea dispute the same?
"Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,
"One but allowed validity,—for, harsh
"And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth,
"For, this and that, will the ingenious sex
"Demonstrate the best master e'er graced slave:
"And there's but one short way to end the coil,—
"Acknowledge right and reason steadily
"I' the man and master: then the wife submits
"To plain truth broadly stated. Does the time
"Advise we shift—a pillar? nay, a stake
"Out of its place i' the social tenement?
"One touch may send a shudder through the heap
"And bring it toppling on our children's heads!
"Moreover, if ours breed a qualm in thee,
"Give thine own better feeling play for once!
"Thou, whose own life winks o'er the socket-edge,
"Wouldst thou it went out in such ugly snuff
"As dooming sons dead, e'en though justice prompt?
"Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas' self
"Was set free, not to cloud the general cheer:
"Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close!
"Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears
"The howl begin, scarce the three little taps[1]
"O' the silver mallet silent on thy brow,—
"'His last act was to sacrifice a Count
"'And thereby screen a scandal of the Church!
"'Guido condemned, the Canon justified
"'Of course,—delinquents of his cloth go free!'
"And so the Luthers chuckle, Calvins scowl,
"So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair
"Whence he may hold forth till doom's day on just
"These *petit-maître* priestlings,—in the choir
"*Sanctus et Benedictus*, with a brush
"Of soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb,

[1] *The three little taps:* when a pope dies, the Cardinal Camerlengo has to assure himself of his death by tapping thrice on his forehead with a silver mallet.

"Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment!
"Does this give umbrage to a husband? Death
"To the fool, and to the priest impunity!
"But no impunity to any friend
"So simply over-loyal as these four
"Who made religion of their patron's cause,
"Believed in him and did his bidding straight,
"Asked not one question but laid down the lives
"This Pope took,—all four lives together make
"Just his own length of days,—so, dead they lie,
"As these were times when loyalty's a drug,
"And zeal in a subordinate too cheap
"And common to be saved when we spend life!
"Come, 'tis too much good breath we waste in words:
"The pardon, Holy Father! Spare grimace,
"Shrugs and reluctance! Are not we the world,
"Art not thou Priam? Let soft culture plead
"Hecuba-like, '*non tali*'[1] (Virgil serves)
"'*Auxilio*' and the rest! Enough, it works!
"The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth,
"The father's bowels yearn, the man's will bends,
"Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts
"Big with a benediction, wait the word
"Shall circulate thro' the city in a trice,
"Set every window flaring, give each man
"O' the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.
"Pronounce then, for our breath and patience fail!"

I will, Sirs: but a voice other than yours
Quickens my spirit. "*Quis pro Domino?*
"Who is upon the Lord's side?" asked the Count.
I, who write—
"On receipt of this command,
"Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
"They die to-morrow: could it be to-night,
"The better, but the work to do, takes time.
"Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
"Not in the customary place, by Bridge
"Saint Angelo, where die the common sort;
"But since the man is noble, and his peers
"By predilection haunt the People's Square,
"There let him be beheaded in the midst,
"And his companions hanged on either side:
"So shall the quality see, fear and learn.
"All which work takes time: till to-morrow, then,
"Let there be prayer incessant for the five!"

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night:
And how should I dare die, this man let live?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor!

XI.—GUIDO.

You are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,
Abate Panciatichi—two good Tuscan names:
Acciaiuoli—ah, your ancestor it was
Built the huge battlemented convent-block

[1] *Non tali auxilio:* Virgil, *Æn.* II. 521—"not with such aid" as thine is religion to be benefited, any more than Troy could be saved by Priam's arms.

Over the little forky flashing Greve
That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill
Just as one first sees Florence: oh those days!
'Tis Ema, though, the other rivulet,
The one-arched brown brick bridge yawns over,—yes,
Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain
The Roman Gate from where the Ema's bridged:
Kingfishers fly there: how I see the bend
O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,
That Senescal (we styled him) of your House!
I do adjure you, help me, Sirs! My blood
Comes from as far a source: ought it to end
This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks
Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs?
Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,
If there be any vile experiment
In the air,—if this your visit simply prove,
When all's done, just a well-intentioned trick
That tries for truth truer than truth itself,
By startling up a man, ere break of day,
To tell him he must die at sunset,—pshaw!
That man's a Franceschini; feel his pulse,
Laugh at your folly, and let's all go sleep!
You have my last word,—innocent am I
As Innocent my Pope and murderer,
Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own,
As Mary's self,—I said, say and repeat,—
And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence? I—
Whom, not twelve hours ago, the gaoler bade
Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound
That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay
His due of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross
His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,
As gallants use who go at large again!
For why? All honest Rome approved my part;
Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter,—nay,
Mistress,—had any shadow of any right
That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,
Held it with tooth and nail, — these manly men
Approved! I being for Rome, Rome was for me.
Then, there's the point reserved, the subterfuge
My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,
Firm should all else,—the impossible fancy!—fail,
And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day.
The knaves! One plea at least would hold,—they laughed,—
One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock
Even should the middle mud let anchor go!
I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's,—plea
Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,
Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.
The Pope moreover, this old Innocent,
Being so meek and mild and merciful,
So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,
So . . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell!
Why must he cure us of our strange conceit
Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved
And looked should help us at a pinch? He help?
He pardon? Here's his mind and message—death!
Thank the good Pope! Now, is he good in this,
Never mind, Christian, — no such stuff's extant,—
But will my death do credit to his reign,
Show he both lived and let live, so was good?
Cannot I live if he but like? "The law!"
Why, just the law gives him the very chance,
The precise leave to let my life alone,
Which the archangelic soul of him (he says)
Yearns after! Here they drop it in his palm,
My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind,—
Drop life to take and hold and keep: but no!
He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,
Motions away the gift they bid him grasp,
And of the coyness comes—that off I run
And down I go, he best knows whither! mind,
He knows, who sets me rolling all the same!
Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,
This way he abrogates and disallows,
Nullifies and ignores,—reverts in fine

To the good and right, in detriment of me !
Talk away ! Will you have the naked truth ?
He's sick of his life's supper,—swallowed lies :
So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw
Just where I sit o' the door-sill. Sir Abate,
Can you do nothing ? Friends, we used to frisk :
What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,
This cut across our good companionship
That showed its front so gay when both were young ?
Were not we put into a beaten path,
Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,
We body of friends with each his scutcheon full
Of old achievement and impunity,—
Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute
As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds
And take equestrian sport over the green
Under the blue, across the crop,—what care ?
If we went prancing up hill and down dale,
In and out of the level and the straight,
By the bit of pleasant byeway, where was harm ?
Still Sol salutes me and the morning laughs :
I see my grandsire's hoof-prints,—point the spot
Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave
For daring throw gibe—much less, stone—from pale :
Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.
Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,
Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,
Something of a sudden jerks at somebody—
A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust,
Because I play some prank my grandsire played,
And here I sprawl : where is the company ? Gone !
A trot and a trample ! only I lie trapped,
Writhe in a certain novel springe just set
By the good old Pope : I'm first prize. Warn me ? Why ?
Apprise me that the law o' the game is changed ?
Enough that I'm a warning, as I writhe,
To all and each my fellows of the file,
And make law plain henceforward past mistake,
"For such a prank, death is the penalty !"
Pope the Five Hundredth (what do I know or care ?)
Deputes your Eminency and Abateship
To announce that, twelve hours from this time, he needs
I just essay upon my body and soul
The virtue of his brand-new engine, prove
Represser of the pranksome ! I'm the first !
Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean to try
The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat ?
I know it,—I have seen and hate it,—ay,
As you shall, while I tell you ! Let me talk,
Or leave me, at your pleasure ! talk I must :
What is your visit but my lure to talk ?
Nay, you have something to disclose ?—a smile,
At end of the forced sternness, means to mock
The heart-beats here ? I call your two hearts stone !
Is your charge to stay with me till I die ?
Be tacit as your bench, then ! Use your ears,
I use my tongue : how glibly yours will run
At pleasant supper-time . . . God's curse ! . . . to-night
When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk
"Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch !
"Now we shall have the Abate's story !"

Life !
How I could spill this overplus of mine
Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked odds and ends
Of body and soul old age is chewing dry !
Those windlestraws that stare while purblind death
Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,
And misses just the bunch of withered weed
Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with flame !
How the life I could shed yet never shrink,
Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May !

Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs?—
With manifold and plenitudinous life,
Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat,
Answer his "Be thou not!" by "Thus I am!"—
Terrible so to be alive yet die?

How I live, how I see! so,—how I speak!
Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips:
I never had the words at will before.
How I see all my folly at a glance!
"A man requires a woman and a wife:"
There was my folly; I believed the saw.
I knew that just myself concerned myself,
Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack,
In a woman,—why, the woman's in the man!
Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!
Overmuch life turns round my woman-side:
The male and female in me, mixed before,
Settle of a sudden: I'm my wife outright
In this unmanly appetite for truth,
This careless courage as to consequence,
This instantaneous sight through things and through,
This voluble rhetoric, if you please,—'tis she!
Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew,
Also the folly for which I slew her!
Fool!
And, fool-like, what is it I wander from?
What did I say of your sharp iron tooth?
Ah,—that I know the hateful thing! this way.
I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,
One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware
Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,
Came on your fine axe in a frame, that falls
And so cuts off a man's head underneath,
Mannaia,—thus we made acquaintance first:
Out of the way, in a by-part o' the town,
At the Mouth-of-Truth o' the river-side, you know:
One goes by the Capitol: and wherefore coy,
Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome?
Because a very little time ago
It had done service, chopped off head from trunk
Belonging to a fellow whose poor house
The thing must make a point to stand before—
Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name
Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,
(Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by)
And, after use of much improper speech,
Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,
Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept
Felice's sister who would sit and sing
I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe
To deck the brutes with,—on their gear it goes,—
The good girl with the velvet in her voice.
So did the Duke, so did Felice, so
Did Justice, intervening with her axe.
There the man-mutilating engine stood
At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard
Off duty,—purified itself as well,
Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week,—
And doing incidental good, 'twas hoped,
To the rough lesson-lacking populace
Who now and then, forsooth, must right their wrongs!
There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold, railed
Considerately round to elbow-height,
For fear an officer should tumble thence
And sprain his ankle and be lame a month
Through starting when the axe fell and head too!
Railed likewise were the steps whereby 'twas reached.
All of it painted red: red, in the midst,
Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,
Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach,
The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge
Had slammed, jerked, shot, slid,—I shall soon find which!—
And so lay quiet, fast in its fit place,
The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed
By the blade which blocked its curvature: apart,
The other half,—the under half-moon board

Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace,—
Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside
Out of the way when done with,—down you kneel,
In you're pushed, over you the other drops,
Tight you're clipped, whiz, there's the blade cleaves its best,
Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,
And where's your soul gone? That, too, I shall find!
This kneeling-place was red, red, never fear!
But only slimy-like with paint, not blood,
For why? a decent pitcher stood at hand,
A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom
By some unnamed utensil,—scraper-rake,—
Each with a conscious air of duty done.
Underneath, loungers,—boys and some few men,—
Discoursed this platter, named the other tool,
Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,
Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate
What the round brush is used for, what the square,—
So was explained—to me the skill-less then—
The manner of the grooming for next world
Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.
There's no such lovely month in Rome as May—
May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,
And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,
One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars
Of the engine—I began acquaintance with,
Understood, hated, hurried from before,
To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul!
Here it is all again, conserved for use:
Twelve hours hence, I may know more, not hate worse.

That young May-moon-month! Devils of the deep!
Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now?
Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,
Chuckle,—his nephew so exact the wag
To play a jealous cullion such a trick
As wins the wife i' the pleasant story! Well?
Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?
I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold,
The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors,
Received the compliments o' the quality
For justice done him,—bowed and smirked his best,
And in return passed round a pretty thing,
A portrait of Felice's sister's self,
Florid old rogue Albano's masterpiece,
As—better than virginity in rags—
Bouncing Europa on the back o' the bull:
They laughed and took their road the safelier home.
Ah, but times change, there's quite another Pope,
I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place,
And, being no Felice, lout and clout,
Stomach but ill the phrase "I lose my head!"
How euphemistic! Lose what? Lose your ring,
Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief!—but, your head?
I learnt the process at an early age;
'Twas useful knowledge, in those same old days,
To know the way a head is set on neck.
My fencing-master urged "Would you excel?
"Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard,
"Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow!
"See me dissect a little, and know your game!
"Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."
Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours!
Here go the vertebræ, here's *Atlas*, here
Axis, and here the symphyses stop short,
So wisely and well,—as, o'er a corpse, we cant,—
And here's the silver cord which . . . what's our word?
Depends from the gold bowl, which loosed (not "lost")
Lets us from heaven to hell,—one chop, we're loose!
"And not much pain i' the process," quoth a sage:
Who told him? Not Felice's ghost, I think!

Such "losing" is scarce Mother Nature's mode.
She fain would have cord ease itself away,
Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,
Snap while we slumber: that seems bearable.
I'm told one clot of blood extravasate
Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword,—
One drop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace,—
Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,
On the arachnoid tunic of my brain.
That's Nature's way of loosing cord!—but Art,
How of Art's process with the engine here,
When bowl and cord alike are crushed across,
Bored between, bruised through? Why, if Fagon's self,
The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner,
Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,
Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,
With just a "See how facile, gentlefolk!"—
The thing were not so bad to bear! Brute force
Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out
O' the hard and soft of you: is that the same?
A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf:
A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch,
Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
Behind him!

And why, why must this needs be?
Oh, if men were but good! They are not good,
Nowise like Peter: people called him rough,
But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,
—"*Petrus, quo vadis?*"[1]—doubtless, I should hear,

"To free the prisoner and forgive his fault!
"I plucked the absolute dead from God's own bar,
"And raised up Dorcas,—why not rescue thee?"
What would cost one such nullifying word?
If Innocent succeeds to Peter's place,
Let him think Peter's thought, speak Peter's speech!
I say, he is bound to it: friends, how say you?
Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness
And mystery of murder in the flesh,
Why should that fact keep the Pope's mouth shut fast?
He execrates my crime,—good!—sees hell yawn
One inch from the red plank's end which I press,—
Nothing is better! What's the consequence?
How should a Pope proceed that knows his cue?
Why, leave me linger out my minute here,
Since close on death comes judgment and comes doom,
Not crib at dawn its pittance from a sheep
Destined ere dewfall to be butcher's-meat!
Think, Sirs, if I have done you any harm,
And you require the natural revenge,
Suppose, and so intend to poison me,
—Just as you take and slip into my draught
The paperful of powder that clears scores,
You notice on my brow a certain blue:
How you both overset the wine at once!
How you both smile! "Our enemy has the plague!
"Twelve hours hence he'll be scraping his bones bare
"Of that intolerable flesh, and die,
"Frenzied with pain: no need for poison here!
"Step aside and enjoy the spectacle!"
Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent!
Christ's maxim is—one soul outweighs the world:
Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world!
"No," venerable sire, I hear you smirk,

[1] *Petrus, quo vadis?*: an allusion to the legend that St. Peter was leaving Rome on the outbreak of the Neronian persecution, when he met Christ coming towards the city, and addressed Him with the words, "*Domine, quo vadis?*" "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The answer was, "To Rome, to be crucified again"; whereupon Peter turned back and met his martyrdom.

"No: for Christ's gospel changes names, not things,
"Renews the obsolete, does nothing more!
"Our fire-new gospel is re-tinkered law,
"Our mercy, justice,—Jove's rechristened God,—
"Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,
"'Tis pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,
"Lingers on earth, although Law's day be done,
"Else would benignant Gospel interpose,
"Not furtively as now, but bold and frank
"O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,
"Law being harshness, Gospel only love—
"We tell the people, on the contrary,
"Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall;
"Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps!
"Does Law permit a taste of Gospel-grace?
"The secular arm allow the spiritual power
"To act for once?—no compliment so fine
"As that our Gospel handsomely turn harsh,
"Thrust victim back on Law the nice and coy!"
Yes, you do say so, else you would forgive
Me whom Law does not touch but tosses you!
Don't think to put on the professional face!
You know what I know: casuists as you are,
Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and stand,
At such illogical inconsequence!
Dear my friends, do but see! A murder's tried,
There are two parties to the cause: I'm one,
—Defend myself, as somebody must do:
I have the best o' the battle: that's a fact,
Simple fact,—fancies find no place just now.
What though half Rome condemned me? Half approved:
And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last,
All Rome, i' the main, acquitting me: whereon,
What has the Pope to ask but "How finds Law?"
"I find," replies Law, "I have erred this while:
"Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,
"No layman: he is therefore yours, not mine:
"I bound him: loose him, you whose will is Christ's!"
And now what does this Vicar of our Lord,
Shepherd o' the flock,—one of whose charge bleats sore
For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns?
Law suffers him employ the crumpled end:
His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,
And thrust the shuddering sheep, he calls a wolf,
Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes!
"Guiltless," cries Law—"Guilty" corrects the Pope!
"Guilty," for the whim's sake! "Guilty," he somehow thinks,
And anyhow says: 'tis truth; he dares not lie!

Others should do the lying. That's the cause
Brings you both here: I ought in decency
Confess to you that I deserve my fate,
Am guilty, as the Pope thinks,—ay, to the end,
Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie
I' the latest gasp of me! What reason, Sirs?
Because to-morrow will succeed to-day
For you, though not for me: and if I stick
Still to the truth, declare with my last breath,
I die an innocent and murdered man,—
Why, there's the tongue of Rome will wag apace
This time to-morrow: don't I hear the talk!
"So, to the last he proved impenitent?
"Pagans have said as much of martyred saints!
"Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole case.
"Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something, that.
"Doubtless the man's dead, dead enough, don't fear!
"But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,
"A touch of . . . eh? You see, the Pope's so old,
"Some of us add, obtuse: age never slips

"The chance of shoving youth to face death first!"
And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk
You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,
And end, the edifying way. I end,
Telling the truth! Your self-styled shepherd thieves!
A thief—and how thieves hate the wolves we know:
Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all's one!
The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw.
That's only natural, that's right enough:
But why the wolf should compliment the thief
With shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks,
And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him,—eh,
Cardinal? My Abate, scarcely thus!
There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on't, go—
Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag!
Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass
Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast
The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end?
If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,
Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
Will that assist the engine half-way back
Into its hiding-house?—boards, shaking now,
Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat
That wants, at winter's end, to wake and prey!
Will howling put the spectre back to sleep?
Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs!
Since I want new life like the creature,—life,
Being done with here, begins i' the world away:
I shall next have "Come, mortals, and be judged!"
There's but a minute betwixt this and then:
So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul!
Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist!
Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,
Civilization and society!
Come, one good grapple, I with all the world!
Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing;
The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze
The indignant soul, and I'm combustion-ripe.
Why, you intend to do your worst with me!
That's in your eyes! You dare no more than death,
And mean no less. I must make up my mind.
So Pietro,—when I chased him here and there,
Morsel by morsel cut away the life
I loathed,—cried for just respite to confess
And save his soul: much respite did I grant!
Why grant me respite who deserve my doom?
Me—who engaged to play a prize, fight you,
Knowing your arms, and foil you, trick for trick,
At rapier-fence, your match and, maybe, more.
I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,
Solace my lusts out of the regular way
Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,
Have to try skill with a redoubted foe;
You would lunge, I would parry, and make end.
At last, occasion of a murder comes:
We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard,
And in goes the cold iron at my breast,
Out at my back, and end is made of me.
You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman,—ay,
But on your triumph you increase, it seems,
Want more of me than lying flat on face:
I ought to raise my ruined head, allege
Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,
But my antagonist dispensed with steel!
There was no passage of arms, you looked me low,
With brow and eye abolished cut and thrust
Nor used the vulgar weapon! This chance scratch,
This incidental hurt, this sort of hole
I' the heart of me? I stumbled, got it so!
Fell on my own sword as a bungler may!

Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust
To the naked virtue: it was virtue stood
Unarmed and awed me,—on my brow there burned
Crime out so plainly intolerably red,
That I was fain to cry—"Down to the dust
"With me, and bury there brow, brand and all!"
Law had essayed the adventure,—but what's Law?
Morality exposed the Gorgon shield!
Morality and Religion conquer me.
If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat
I supplement law, and confess forsooth?
Did not the Trial show things plain enough?
"Ah, but a word of the man's very self
"Would somehow put the keystone in its place
"And crown the arch!" Then take the word you want!

I say that, long ago, when things began,
All the world made agreement, such and such
Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be:
You must not kill the man whose death would please
And profit you, unless his life stop yours
Plainly, and need so be put aside:
Get the thing by a public course, by law,
Only no private bloodshed as of old!
All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such licence and conformed to law:
Who breaks law, breaks pact therefore, helps himself
To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit,—pain beyond his share:
For, pleasure being the sole good in the world,
Anyone's pleasure turns to someone's pain,
So, law must watch for everyone,—say we,
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes,
Punishment: quite right! thus the world goes round.
I, being well aware such pact there was,
I, in my time who found advantage come
Of law's observance and crime's penalty,—
Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends,
Had doubtless given example long ago,
Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my pain,
And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life,—
I could not, for that foolish life of me,
Help risking law's infringement,—I broke bond,
And needs must pay price,—wherefore, here's my head,
Flung with a flourish! But, repentance too?
But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?
Cardinal, no! Abate, scarcely thus!
'Tis the fault, not that I dared try a fall
With Law and straightway am found undermost,
But that I failed to see, above man's law,
God's precept you, the Christians, recognize?
Colly my cow! Don't fidget, Cardinal!
Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
And exorcize the devil, for here he stands
And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
Daring you drive him hence! You, Christians both?
I say, if ever was such faith at all
Born in the world, by your community
Suffered to live its little tick of time,
'Tis dead of age, now, ludicrously dead;
Honour its ashes, if you be discreet,
In epitaph only! For, concede its death,
Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked
What feats the thing did in a crazy land
At a fabulous epoch,—treat your faith, that way,
Just as you treat your relics: "Here's a shred
"Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone,
"Raised King Cophetua, who was dead, to life
"In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since,
"Such was its virtue!"—twangs the Sacristan,

Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet
Because of gout in every finger joint:
Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,
Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts?
I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,
But, for the grace, the quality of cure,—
Cophetua was the man put that to proof!
Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown
And shamed at once: you banter while you bow!
Do you dispute this? Come, a monster-laugh,
A madman's laugh, allowed his Carnival
Later ten days than when all Rome, but he,
Laughed at the candle-contest: mine's alight,
'Tis just it sputter till the puff o' the Pope
End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.
Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass
In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye,
What but that—feigning everywhere grows fact,
Professors turn possessors, realize
The faith they play with as a fancy now,
And bid it operate, have full effect
On every circumstance of life, to-day,
In Rome,—faith's flow set free at fountain-head!
Now, you'll own, at this present, when I speak,
Before I work the wonder, there's no man,
Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain-head,
But might, if each were minded, realize
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite—
Set it to work on life unflinchingly,
Yet give no symptom of an outward change:
Why should things change because men disbelieve
What's incompatible, in the whited tomb,
With bones and rottenness one inch below?
What saintly act is done in Rome to-day
But might be prompted by the devil,—"is"
I say not,—"has been, and again may be,—"
I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix
You try to stop my mouth with! Off with it!
Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes!
You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
Unbelief still might work the wires and move
Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.
Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,
Or,—having got above his head, grown Pope,—
Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet!
Do you suppose I am at loss at all
Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast?
Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go!—all of it,
In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt,
And wit explain to who has eyes to see.
But, lo, I wave wand, make the false the true!
Here's Rome believes in Christianity!
What an explosion, how the fragments fly
Of what was surface, mask and make-believe!
Begin now,—look at this Pope's-halberdier
In wasp-like black and yellow foolery!
He, doing duty at the corridor,
Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin!
Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length,
Pushes into the presence, pantingly
Submits the extreme peril of the case
To the Pope's self,—whom in the world beside?—
And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,
Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait
Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,
A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm!
His Altitude the Referendary,—
Robed right, and ready for the usher's word
To pay devoir,—is, of all times, just then
'Ware of a master-stroke of argument
Will cut the spinal cord . . . ugh, ugh! . . . I mean,
Paralyse Molinism for evermore!
Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,

Down steps to reach home, write, if but a word
Shall end the impudence: he leaves who likes
Go pacify the Pope: there's Christ to serve!
How otherwise would men display their zeal?
If the same sentry had the least surmise
A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay
In neighbourhood with what might prove a match,
Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both—
Would he not break through courtiers, rank and file,
Bundle up, bear off and save body so,
The Pope, no matter for his priceless soul?
There's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly swinge,
Only a man in earnest, you'll so praise
And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring!
Had thought possessed the Referendary
His jewel-case at home was left ajar,
What would be wrong in running, robes awry,
To be beforehand with the pilferer?
What talk then of indecent haste? Which means,
That both these, each in his degree, would do
Just that,—for a comparative nothing's sake,
And thereby gain approval and reward,—
Which, done for what Christ says is worth the world,
Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks.
I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip
Be recognized a lie in heart of you!
How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,
When there's a guest poisoned at supper-time
And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek?
"Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears,
"Have at him by the beard, warn anyhow!"
Good, and this other friend that's cheat and thief
And dissolute,—go stop the devil's feast,
Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire!
Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend
"You lie, and I admonish you for Christ!"
Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass
To warn him—on his knees, and tinkle[1] near,—
He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,
The Trebbian running: what a grateful jump
Out of the Church rewards your vigilance!
Perform that self-same service just a thought
More maladroitly,—since a bishop sits
At function!—and he budges not, bites lip,—
"You see my case: how can I quit my post?
"He has an eye to any such default.
"See to it, neighbour, I beseech your love!"
He and you know the relative worth of things,
What is permissible or inopportune.
Contort your brows! You know I speak the truth:
Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i' the Book:
Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize!
—Despite your muster of some fifty monks
And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,
Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross,
Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far,—
I grant you! Fifty times the number squeak
And gibber in the madhouse—firm of faith,
This fellow, that his nose supports the moon;
The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope:
Does that prove all the world outside insane?
Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob
That acts on the frank faithless principle,
Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
With just as much a right to judge as you,—

[1] *Tinkle:* the ringing of the bell which denotes the elevation of the Host.

As many senses in his soul, and nerves
I' neck of him as I,—whom, soul and sense,
Neck and nerve, you abolish presently,—
I being the unit in creation now
Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine,
A creature's duty, spend my last of breath
In bearing witness, even by my worst fault,
To the creature's obligation, absolute,
Perpetual: my worst fault protests, "The faith
"Claims all of me: I would give all she claims,
"But for a spice of doubt: the risk's too rash:
"Double or quits, I play, but, all or nought,
"Exceeds my courage: therefore, I descend
"To the next faith with no dubiety—
"Faith in the present life, made last as long
"And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,
"Whatever pain it cause the world." I'm wrong?
I've had my life, whate'er I lose: I'm right?
I've got the single good there was to gain.
Entire faith, or else complete unbelief!
Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
Mine and God's also, doubtless: ask yourself,
Cardinal, where and how you like a man!
Why, either with your feet upon his head,
Confessed your caudatory,[1] or, at large,
The stranger in the crowd who caps to you
But keeps his distance,—why should he presume?
You want no hanger-on and dropper-off,
Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own,
According as the sky looks black or bright.
Just so I capped to and kept off from faith—
You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,
Yet leave i' the lurch at the first spit of rain.
Who holds to faith whenever rain begins?
What does the father when his son lies dead,
The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
The politician whom a rival ousts?
No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes:
Where's the obedience that shall edify?
Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith
And take the natural course,—this rends his hair
Because his child is taken to God's breast,
That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash
Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,
And this, enabled to inherit earth
Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold!
Down they all drop to my low level, rest
Heart upon dungy earth that's warm and soft,
And let who please attempt the altitudes.
Each playing prodigal son of heavenly sire,
Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,
Fain to fill belly with the husks, we swine
Did eat by born depravity of taste!

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you—
Who never budged from litter where I lay,
And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,
Cried amen to my creed's one article—
"Get pleasure, 'scape pain,—give your preference
"To the immediate good, for time is brief,
"And death ends good and ill and everything!
"What's got is gained, what's gained soon is gained twice,
"And,—inasmuch as faith gains most,—feign faith!"
So did we brother-like pass word about:
—You, now,—like bloody drunkards but half-drunk,
Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools,—
Vexed that a titter gains the gravest mouth,—
O' the sudden you must needs re-introduce
Solemnity, straight sober undue mirth
By a blow dealt me your boon companion here
Who, using the old licence, dreamed of harm
No more than snow in harvest: yet it falls!
You check the merriment effectually
By pushing your abrupt machine i' the midst,
Making me Rome's example: blood for wine!
The general good needs that you chop and change!
I may dislike the hocus-pocus,—Rome,

[1] *Caudatory:* attached to your train.

The laughter-loving people, won't they stare
Chap-fallen!—while serious natures sermonize
"The magistrate, he beareth not the sword
"In vain; who sins may taste its edge, we see!"
Why my sin, drunkards? Where have I abused
Liberty, scandalized you all so much?
Who called me, who crooked finger till I came,
Fool that I was, to join companionship?
I knew my own mind, meant to live my life,
Elude your envy, or else make a stand,
Take my own part and sell you my life dear.
But it was "Fie! No prejudice in the world
"To the proper manly instinct! Cast your lot
"Into our lap, one genius ruled our births,
"We'll compass joy by concert; take with us
"The regular irregular way i' the wood;
"You'll miss no game through riding breast by breast,
"In this preserve, the Church's park and pale,
"Rather than outside where the world lies waste!"
Come, if you said not that, did you say this?
Give plain and terrible warning, "Live, enjoy?
"Such life begins in death and ends in hell!
"Dare you bid us assist your sins, us priests
"Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth?
"No such delight for us, why then for you?
"Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite!"
Had you so warned me, not in lying words
But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,
That had been fair, that might have struck a man,
Silenced the squabble between soul and sense,
Compelled him to make mind up, take one course
Or the other, peradventure!—wrong or right,
Foolish or wise, you would have been at least
Sincere, no question,—forced me choose, indulge
Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf
Or find my way submissive to your fold,
Be red-crossed on my fleece, one sheep the more.
But you as good as bade me wear sheep's wool
Over wolf's skin, suck blood and hide the noise
By mimicry of something like a bleat,—
Whence it comes that because, despite my care,
Because I smack my tongue too loud for once,
Drop baaing, here's the village up in arms!
Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed!
Oh, were it only open yet to choose—
One little time more—whether I'd be free
Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth!
Should not you get a growl through the white fangs
In answer to your beckoning! Cardinal,
Abate, managers o' the multitude,
I'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure!
You should manipulate the coarse rough mob:
'Tis you I'd deal directly with, not them,—
Using your fears: why touch the thing myself
When I could see you hunt, and then cry "Shares!
"Quarter the carcase or we quarrel; come,
"Here's the world ready to see justice done!"
Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game
Wherein the winner's chance were worth the pains!
We'd try conclusions!—at the worst, what worse
Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute's talk
Helps push an inch the nearer me? Fool, fool!

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs?
I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe—
All's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric!
One must try each expedient to save life.
One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold
By putting in their place men wise like you,
To take the full force of an argument
Would buffet their stolidity in vain.
If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind

O' the blow that means to miss you and maul them,
That's my success! Is it not folly, now,
To say with folk, "A plausible defence—
"We see through notwithstanding, and reject?"
Reject the plausible they do, these fools,
Who never even make pretence to show
One point beyond its plausibility
In favour of the best belief they hold!
"Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead:"
Did he? How do you come to know as much?
"Know it, what need? The story's plausible,
"Avouched for by a martyrologist,
"And why should good men sup on cheese and leeks
"On such a saint's day, if there were no saint?"
I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight
Tell them my story—"plausible, but false!"
False, to be sure! What else can story be
That runs—a young wife tired of an old spouse,
Found a priest whom she fled away with,—both
Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,
Which a grey-headed greyer-hearted pair,
(Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)
Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh,
Here incredulity begins! Indeed?
Allow then, were no one point strictly true,
There's that i' the tale might seem like truth at least
To the unlucky husband,—jaundiced patch—
Jealousy maddens people, why not him?
Say, he was maddened, so forgivable!
Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,
The priest true, and the pair of liars true,
They might seem false to one man in the world!
A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting,
And many sly soft stimulants to wrath
Compose a formidable wrong at last
That gets called easily by some one name
Not applicable to the single parts,
And so draws down a general revenge,
Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.
Jealousy! I have known a score of plays,
Were listened to and laughed at in my time
As like the everyday-life on all sides,
Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare,
Suspected all the world contrived his shame.
What did the wife? The wife kissed both eyes blind,
Explained away ambiguous circumstance,
And while she held him captive by the hand,
Crowned his head,—you know what's the mockery,—
By half her body behind the curtain. That's
Nature now! That's the subject of a piece
I saw in Vallombrosa Convent, made
Expressly to teach men what marriage was!
But say "Just so did I misapprehend,
"Imagine she deceived me to my face,"
And that's pretence too easily seen through!
All those eyes of all husbands in all plays,
At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,
Are laughed at for pretending to be keen
While horn-blind: but the moment I step forth—
Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx
And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through!
Such an eye, God's may be,—not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . . what hour is fleeting now?
When you cut earth away from under me,
I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath
Some such an apparitional dread orb
As the eye of God, since such an eye there glares:
I fancy it go filling up the void
Above my mote-self it devours, or what
Proves—wrath, immensity wreaks on nothingness.
Just how I felt once, couching through the dark,
Hard by Vittiano; young I was, and gay,
And wanting to trap fieldfares: first a spark

Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might
Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow,—this
Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.
What do I want with proverbs, precepts here?
Away with man! What shall I say to God?
This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind—
"Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear
"This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot!
"I am one huge and sheer mistake,—whose fault?
"Not mine at least, who did not make myself!"
Someone declares my wife excused me so!
Perhaps she knew what argument to use.
Grind your teeth, Cardinal: Abate, writhe!
What else am I to cry out in my rage,
Unable to repent one particle
O' the past? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man
Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape,
Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert
Groundedly! I want simple sober sense,
That asks, before it finishes with a dog,
Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for?
You both persist to call that act a crime,
Which sense would call . . . yes, I maintain it, Sirs, . . .
A blunder! At the worst, I stood in doubt
On cross-road, took one path of many paths:
It leads to the red thing, we all see now,
But nobody saw at first: one primrose-patch
In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,
Had warned me from such wayfare: let me prove!
Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh!
Advise me when I take the first false step!
Give me my wife: how should I use my wife,
Love her or hate her? Prompt my action now!
There she is, there she stands alive and pale,
The thirteen-years'-old child, with milk for blood,
Pompilia Comparini, as at first,
Which first is only four brief years ago!
I stand too in the little ground-floor room
O' the father's house at Via Vittoria: see!
Her so-called mother,—one arm round the waist
O' the child to keep her from the toys, let fall
At wonder I can live yet look so grim,—
Ushers her in, with deprecating wave
Of the other,—and she fronts me loose at last,
Held only by the mother's finger-tip.
Struck dumb,—for she was white enough before!—
She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
As heifer—the old simile comes pat—
Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.
The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer,—
Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,
Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
Any cross anywhither anyhow,
So but alone, so but apart from me!
You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise,
If 'tis with pity. I resent my wrong,
Being a man: I only show man's soul
Through man's flesh: she sees mine, it strikes her thus!
Is that attractive? To a youth perhaps—
Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl,
To whom it is a flattering novelty
That he, men use to motion from their path,
Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn
A chit whose terror shall be changed apace
To bliss unbearable when grace and glow,
Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch
Esther in all that pretty tremble, cured
By the dove o' the sceptre! But myself am old,
O' the wane at least, in all things: what do you say
To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt?
I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world,
Done-with that way: you like this piece of news?
A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike

Death-damp into the breast of doughty king
Though 'twere French Louis,—soul I understand,—
Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just
"Sire, you are regal, puissant and so forth,
"But—young you have been, are not, nor will be!"
In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up,
"Count, girls incline to mature worth like you!
"As for Pompilia, what's flesh, fish, or fowl
"To one who apprehends no difference,
"And would accept you even were you old
"As you are . . . youngish by her father's side?
"Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush
"Of eyebrow; and for presence, portliness,
"And decent gravity, you beat a boy!"
Deceive yourself one minute, if you may,
In presence of the child that so loves age,
Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,
Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair!
Well, I resent this; I am young in soul,
Nor old in body,—thews and sinews here,—
Though the vile surface be not smooth as once,—
Far beyond that first wheelwork which went wrong
Through the untempered iron ere 'twas proof:
I am the wrought man worth ten times the crude,
Would woman see what this declines to see,
Declines to say "I see,"—the officious word
That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot
New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh!
Therefore 'tis she begins with wronging me,
Who cannot but begin with hating her.
Our marriage follows: there she stands again!
Why do I laugh? Why, in the very gripe
O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull, do I
Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs?
Why from each clashing of his molars, ground
To make the devil bread from out my grist,
Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy?
Take notice we are lovers in a church,
Waiting the sacrament to make us one
And happy! Just as bid, she bears herself,
Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent,—goes:
So have I brought my horse, by word and blow,
To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.
How can I other than remember this,
Resent the very obedience? Gain thereby?
Yes, I do gain my end and have my will,—
Thanks to whom? When the mother speaks the word,
She obeys it—even to enduring me!
There had been compensation in revolt—
Revolt's to quell: but martyrdom rehearsed,
But predetermined saintship for the sake
O' the mother?—"Go!" thought I, "we meet again!"
Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death,
She lives,—wakes up, installed in house and home,
Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine.
Good folk begin at me with open mouth
"Now, at least, reconcile the child to life!
"Study and make her love . . . that is, endure
"The . . . hem! the . . . all of you though somewhat old,
"Till it amount to something, in her eye,
"As good as love, better a thousand times,—
"Since nature helps the woman in such strait,
"Makes passiveness her pleasure: failing which,
"What if you give up boy-and-girl-fools'-play
"And go on to wise friendship all at once?
"Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you know,
"Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon
"To friendship, as they name satiety:
"Thither go you and wait their coming!"
Thanks,

Considerate advisers,—but, fair play!
Had you and I, friends, started fair at first,
We, keeping fair, might reach it, neck by neck,
This blessed goal, whenever fate so please:
But why am I to miss the daisied mile
The course begins with, why obtain the dust
Of the end precisely at the starting-point?
Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads,
The bright red froth wherein our beard should steep
Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine?
Foolish, the love-fit? Let me prove it such
Like you, before like you I puff things clear!
"The best's to come, no rapture but content!
"Not love's first glory but a sober glow,
"Not a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,
"So much as, gained by patience, care and toil,
"Proper appreciation and esteem!"
Go preach that to your nephews, not to me
Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop
And take my first refreshment, pluck a rose:
What's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of leaf,
You counsel I go plant in garden-plot,
Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood,
In confidence the seed shall germinate
And, for its very best, some far-off day,
Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell?
Why must your nephews begin breathing spice
O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy?
Nay, more and worse,—would such my root bear rose—
Prove really flower and favourite, not the kind
That's queen, but those three leaves that make one cup
And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast,—then indeed
The prize though poor would pay the care and toil!
Respect we Nature that makes least as most,
Marvellous in the minim! But this bud,
Bit through and burned black by the tempter's tooth,
This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside
And the wasp inside its bosom,—call you "rose"?
Claim no immunity from a weed's fate
For the horrible present! What you call my wife
I call a nullity in female shape,
Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague,
When mixed with, made confusion and a curse
By two abominable nondescripts,
That father and that mother: think you see
The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines,
The Etruscan monster, the three-headed thing,
Bellerophon's foe! How name you the whole beast?
You choose to name the body from one head,
That of the simple kid which droops the eye,
Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough:
I rather see the griesly lion belch
Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings,
Grafted into the common stock for tail,
And name the brute, Chimæra which I slew!
How was there ever more to be—(concede
My wife's insipid harmless nullity)—
Dissociation from that pair of plagues—
That mother with her cunning and her cant—
The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness, —now,
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips,
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much,—
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff!
As for the father,—Cardinal, you know,
The kind of idiot!—such are rife in Rome,
But they wear velvet commonly; good fools,
At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk
Who grin and bear with imbecility:
Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw
Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve.

But what say we to the same solemn beast
Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat,
When turned, with holes in hide and bones laid bare,
To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,
Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat him? We drub
Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,
Teach Pietro to get trappings or go hang!
Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue
At Via Vittoria, this personified
Authority when time was,—Pantaloon
Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same
As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival!
That's the extreme and unforgivable
Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped
For your own ends to bestialize yourself
By flattery of a fellow of this stamp?
The ends obtained or else shown out of reach,
He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth,—
"You love, and honour me, of course: what next?"
What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend?—
Which taught you how one worships when the shrine
Has lost the relic that we bent before.
Angry! And how could I be otherwise?
'Tis plain: this pair of old pretentious fools
Meant to fool me: it happens, I fooled them.
Why could not these who sought to buy and sell
Me,—when they found themselves were bought and sold,
Make up their mind to the proved rule of right,
Be chattel and not chapman any more?
Miscalculation has its consequence;
But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing
And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece
And finds the veritable wolf beneath,
(How that staunch image serves at every turn!)
Does he, by way of being politic,
Pluck the first whisker grimly visible?
Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude,
Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep
Beats the old other curly-coated kind,
And shall share board and bed, if so it deign,
With its discoverer, like a royal ram?
Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking knees,
Would wisdom treat the adventure! these, forsooth,
Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap
The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth—
Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.
What would you have? The fools transgress, the fools
Forthwith receive appropriate punishment:
They first insult me, I return the blow,
There follows noise enough: four hubbub months,
Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail—
A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint
Because I do not gild the geese their oats,—
I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,
Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere,
Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,
And am just taking thought to breathe again,
Taste the sweet sudden silence all about,
When, there they raise it, the old noise I know,
At Rome i' the distance! "What, begun once more?
"Whine on, wail ever, 'tis the loser's right!"
But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind?
Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all!
And triumph it is. My boast was premature:
The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and crew
Fighting-cock-fashion,—they had filched a pearl
From dung-heap, and might boast with cause enough!
I was defrauded of all bargained for:
You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows
My dowry was derision, my gain—muck,
My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)
The nameless bastard of a common whore:
My old name turned henceforth to . . . shall I say
"He that received the ordure in his face?"
And they who planned this wrong, performed this wrong,

And then revealed this wrong to the wide world,
Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong,—
Why, these were (note hell's lucky malice, now !)
These were just they who, they alone, could act
And publish and proclaim their infamy,
Secure that men would in a breath believe
Compassionate and pardon them,—for why?
They plainly were too stupid to invent,
Too simple to distinguish wrong from right,—
Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth,
Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong
Proud cunning violent oppressor—me !
Follow them to their fate and help your best,
You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of me,
They gave the good long laugh to, at my cost !
Defray your share o' the cost, since you partook
The entertainment ! Do !—assured the while,
That not one stab, I dealt to right and left,
But went the deeper for a fancy—this—
That each might do me two-fold service, find
A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,
And scratch its smirk a little !
Panciatichi !
There's a report at Florence,—is it true?—
That when your relative the Cardinal
Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,
The palace in Via Larga, someone picked
From out the street a saucy quip enough
That fell there from its day's flight through the town,
About the flat front and the windows wide
And bulging heap of cornice,—hitched the joke
Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto,
And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry:
For which he's at the galleys, rowing now
Up to his waist in water,—just because
Panciatic and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat !
I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me
Were not unduly punished? What say you,
Prince of the Church, my patron? Nay, indeed,
I shall not dare insult your wits so much
As think this problem difficult to solve.
This Pietro and Violante then, I say,
These two ambiguous insects, changing name
And nature with the season's warmth or chill,—
Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants,
A very synonym of thrift and peace,—
Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart,
Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,
Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,
And stunk me dead with fetor in the face
Until I stopped the nuisance: there's my crime !
Pity I did not suffer them subside
Into some further shape and final form
Of execrable life? My masters, no !
I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once
Them and their transformations of disgust,
In the snug little Villa out of hand.
"Grant me confession, give bare time for that !"—
Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped.
His life confessed !—that was enough for me,
Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death !
Here's a coil raised, a pother and for what?
Because strength, being provoked by weakness, fought
And conquered,—the world never heard the like !
Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if
'Twas their fate troubled me, too hard to range
Among the right and fit and proper things !

Ay, but Pompilia,—I await your word,—
She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate
In folly, one of alien blood to these
I punish, why extend my claim, exact
Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,
I go too fast: the orator's at fault:
Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them
As she was laid at San Lorenzo late,

I ought to step back, lead you by degrees,
Recounting at each step some fresh offence,
Up to the red bed,—never fear, I will!
Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin,
Confound me with her gentleness and worth!
The horrible pair have fled and left her now,
She has her husband for her sole concern:
His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,
Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride
To groom as is the Church and Spouse to Christ:
There she stands in his presence: "Thy desire
"Shall be to the husband, o'er thee shall he rule!"
—"Pompilia, who declare that you love God,
"You know who said that: then, desire my love,
"Yield me contentment and be ruled aright!"
She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
Strong as stone also. "Well, are they not fled?
"Am I not left, am I not one for all?
"Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,
"Bless me or curse me of your own accord!
"Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,
"Is worth your eyes?" And then the eyes descend,
And do look at me. Is it at the meal?
"Speak!" she obeys, "Be silent!" she obeys,
Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart,"
As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.
Departs she? just the same through door and wall
I see the same stone strength of white despair.
And all this will be never otherwise!
Before, the parents' presence lent her life:
She could play off her sex's armoury,
Entreat, reproach, be female to my male,
Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,
Go clamour to the Commissary, bid
The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,
And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change,
The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!
Since that day when she learned she was no child
Of those she thought her parents,—that their trick
Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late,—
Why, I suppose she said within herself
"Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake!
"And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"
But is there no third party to the pact?
What of her husband's relish or dislike
For this new game of giving up the game,
This worst offence of not offending more?
I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
Set her on to conceive and execute
The preferable plague: how sure they probe—
These jades, the sensitivest soft of man!
The long black hair was wound now in a wisp,
Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late:
No more soiled dress, 'tis trimness triumphs now,
For how should malice go with negligence?
The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!
There was an end to springing out of bed,
Praying me, with face buried on my feet,
Be hindered of my pastime,—so an end
To my rejoinder, "What, on the ground at last?
"Vanquished in fight, a supplicant for life?
"What if I raise you? 'Ware the casting down
"When next you fight me!" Then, she lay there, mine:
Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck,—
A moment of disquiet, working eyes,
Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more,—
As if one killed the horse one could not ride!
Had I enjoined "Cut off the hair!"—why, snap
The scissors, and at once a yard or so

Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor:
But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
To be an eyesore past dishevelment!
Is all done? Then sit still again and stare!
I advise—no one think to bear that look
Of steady wrong, endured as steadily
—Through what sustainment of deluding hope?
Who is the friend i' the background that notes all?
Who may come presently and close accounts?
This self-possession to the uttermost,
How does it differ in aught, save degree,
From the terrible patience of God? "All which just means,
"She did not love you!" Again the word is launched
And the fact fronts me! What, you try the wards
With the true key and the dead lock flies ope?
No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still!
You have some fifty servants, Cardinal,—
Which of them loves you? Which subordinate
But makes parade of such officiousness
That,—if there's no love prompts it,—love, the sham,
Does twice the service done by love, the true?
God bless us liars, where's one touch of truth
In what we tell the world, or world tells us,
Of how we love each other? All the same,
We calculate on word and deed, nor err,—
Bid such a man do such a loving act,
Sure of effect and negligent of cause,
Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue,
Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back
To foot-reach of the stirrup—all for love,
And some for memory of the smart of switch
On the inside of the foreleg—what care we?
Yet where's the bond obliges horse to man
Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God
Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm
And ball of fist—woman the beardless cheek
And proper place to suffer in the side:
Since it is he can strike, let her obey!
Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,
Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthily!
Who's that soprano, Rome went mad about
Last week while I lay rotting in my straw?
The very jailer gossiped in his praise—
How,—dressed up like Armida, though a man;
And painted to look pretty, though a fright,—
He still made love so that the ladies swooned,
Being an eunuch. "Ah, Rinaldo mine!
"But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both!"
All the poor bloodless creature never felt,
Si, do, re, mi, fa, squeak and squall—for what?
Two gold zecchines[1] the evening. Here's my slave,
Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,
Can't falter out the first note in the scale
For her life! Why blame me if I take the life?
All women cannot give men love, forsooth!
No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs—
Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
Brood on a chalk-ball: soon the nest is stocked—
Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit!
This wife of mine was of another mood—
Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,
Nor feign the love that brings real love about:
Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her.
But why particularize, defend the deed?
Say that I hated her for no one cause
Beyond my pleasure so to do,—what then?
Just on as much incitement acts the world,
All of you! Look and like! You favour one,
Browbeat another, leave alone a third,—
Why should you master natural caprice?
Pure nature! Try: plant elm by ash in file;
Both unexceptionable trees enough,
They ought to overlean each other, pair
At top, and arch across the avenue
The whole path to the pleasaunce: do they so—

1 *Zecchines:* a gold coin worth about ten shillings.

Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each?
Lay the fault elsewhere: since we must have faults,
Mine shall have been,—seeing there's ill in the end
Come of my course,—that I fare somehow worse
For the way I took: my fault . . . as God's my judge,
I see not where my fault lies, that's the truth!
I ought . . . oh, ought in my own interest
Have let the whole adventure go untried,
This chance by marriage: or else, trying it,
Ought to have turned it to account, some one
O' the hundred otherwises? Ay, my friend,
Easy to say, easy to do: step right
Now you've stepped left and stumbled on the thing,
—The red thing! Doubt I any more than you
That practice makes man perfect? Give again
The chance,—same marriage and no other wife,
Be sure I'll edify you! That's because
I'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self.
You proffered guidance,—I know, none so well,—
You laid down law and rolled decorum out,
From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side,—
Wanted to make your great experience mine,
Save me the personal search and pains so: thanks!
Take your word on life's use? When I take his—
The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,
Gone blind in padding round and round one path,—
As to the taste of green grass in the field!
What do you know o' the world that's trodden flat
And salted sterile with your daily dung,
Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness?
Take your opinion of the modes of life,
The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,
How to feel, how to scheme, and how to do
Or else leave undone? You preached long and loud
On high-days, "Take our doctrine upon trust!
"Into the mill-house with you! Grind our corn,
"Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow!"
I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,
So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
Browsed on the best: for which you brain me, Sirs!
Be it so. I conceived of life that way,
And still declare—life, without absolute use
Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.
Give me,—pay down,—not promise, which is air,—
Something that's out of life and better still,
Make sure reward, make certain punishment,
Entice me, scare me,—I'll forgo this life;
Otherwise, no!—the less that words, mere wind,
Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague,
Baulk fulness of revenge here,—blame yourselves
For this eruption of the pent-up soul
You prisoned first and played with afterward!
"Deny myself" meant simply pleasure you,
The sacred and superior, save the mark!
You,—whose stupidity and insolence
I must defer to, soothe at every turn,—
Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust
I had to wink at or help gratify,—
While the same passions,—dared they perk in me,
Me, the immeasurably marked, by God,
Master of the whole world of such as you,—
I, boast such passions? 'Twas "Suppress them straight!
"Or stay, we'll pick and choose before destroy.
"Here's wrath in you, a serviceable sword,—
"Beat it into a ploughshare! What's this long
"Lance-like ambition? Forge a pruning-hook,
"May be of service when our vines grow tall!

"But — sword use swordwise, spear thrust out as spear?
"Anathema! Suppression is the word!"
My nature, when the outrage was too gross,
Widened itself an outlet over-wide
By way of answer, sought its own relief
With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.
All your own doing: preachers, blame yourselves!

'Tis I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs!
God keep me patient! All I say just means—
My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine,—
That's immaterial,—a true stumbling-block
I' the way of me her husband. I but plied
The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path,
Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,
Plucked at law's robe a-rustle through the courts,
Bowed down to kiss divinity's buckled shoe
Cushioned i' the church: efforts all wide the aim!
Procedures to no purpose! Then flashed truth.
The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive
In law and gospel: there be nods and winks
Instruct a wise man to assist himself
In certain matters, nor seek aid at all.
"Ask money of me,"—quoth the clownish saw,—
"And take my purse! But,—speaking with respect,—
"Need you a solace for the troubled nose?
"Let everybody wipe his own himself!"
Sirs, tell me free and fair! Had things gone well
At the wayside inn: had I surprised asleep
The runaways, as was so probable,
And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,
Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade
Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
Were loaded with unlawful game for once—
Would you have interposed to damp the glow
Applauding me on every husband's cheek?
Would you have checked the cry "A judgment, see!
"A warning, note! Be henceforth chaste, ye wives,
"Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests!"
If you had, then your house against itself
Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more.
Oh why, why was it not ordained just so?
Why fell not things out so nor otherwise?
Ask that particular devil whose task it is
To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur
The line of the painter just where paint leaves off
And life begins,—put ice into the ode
O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza—fire!"
Inscribe all human effort with one word,
Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!
Being incomplete, my act escaped success.
Easy to blame now! Every fool can swear
To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.
But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye,
What was there wanting to a masterpiece
Except the luck that lies beyond a man?
My way with the woman, now proved grossly wrong,
Just missed of being gravely grandly right
And making mouths laugh on the other side.
Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,
Go with him over that spoiled work once more!
Take only its first flower, the ended act
Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct!
I march to the Villa, and my men with me,
That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
I say . . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like
While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
"Let me forebode! Thus far, too much success:
"I want the natural failure—find it where?

"Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
"I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom
"Wove this long while, and now next minute tests?
"Of three that are to catch, two should go free,
"One must: all three surprised,—impossible!
"Beside, I seek three and may chance on six,—
"This neighbour, t'other gossip,—the babe's birth
"Brings such to fireside, and folks give them wine,—
"'Tis late: but when I break in presently
"One will be found outlingering the rest
"For promise of a posset,—one whose shout
"Would raise the dead down in the catacombs,
"Much more the city-watch that goes its round.
"When did I ever turn adroitly up
"To sun some brick embedded in the soil,
"And with one blow crush all three scorpions there?
"Or Pietro or Violante shambles off—
"It cannot be but I surprise my wife—
"If only she is stopped and stamped on, good!
"That shall suffice: more is improbable.
"Now I may knock!" And this once for my sake
The impossible was effected: I called king,
Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,
All three, three only! So, I had my way,
Did my deed: so, unbrokenly lay bare
Each tænia[1] that had sucked me dry of juice,
At last outside me, not an inch of ring
Left now to writhe about and root itself
I' the heart all powerless for revenge! Henceforth
I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned.
Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave
When the load's off you, ringing as it runs
All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!

[1] *Tænia:* a tape-worm.

No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,
Turned my brain with the influx of success
As if the sole need now were to wave wand
And find doors fly wide,—wish and have my will,—
The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape
Easy enough were that, and poor beside!
It all but proved so,—ought to quite have proved,
Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free
Anyone, with his senses at command,
From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,
Redundantly triumphant,—some reverse
Was sure to follow! There's no other way
Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then
And there on the instant. Any day o' the week,
A ducat slid discreetly into palm
O' the mute post-master, while you whisper him—
How you the Count and certain four your knaves,
Have just been mauling who was malapert,
Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,
Therefore, want horses in a hurry,—that
And nothing more secures you any day
The pick o' the stable! Yet I try the trick,
Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,
And say the dead man only was a Jew,
And for my pains find I am dealing just
With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome—
Just this immaculate official stares,
Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,
Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,
Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,
Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road!
"Where's the Permission?" Where's the wretched rag
With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,
To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago?
"Gone? Get another, or no horses hence!"
He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,
But hinders,—hacks and hamstrings sure enough,
Gives me some twenty miles of miry road

More to march in the middle of that night
Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength
O' the youngsters, much more mine, both soul and flesh,
Who had to think as well as act: dead-beat,
We gave in ere we reached the boundary
And safe spot out of this irrational Rome,—
Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,
We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,
Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany,
Where laws make wise allowance, understand
Civilized life and do its champions right!
Witness the sentence of the Rota there,
Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,
One week before I acted on its hint,—
Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,
The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's saint,—
Rome manufactures saints enough to know,—
Seclusion at the Stinche for her life.
All this, that all but was, might all have been,
Yet was not! baulked by just a scrupulous knave
Whose palm was horn through handling horses' hoofs
And could not close upon my proffered gold!
What say you to the spite of fortune? Well,
The worst's in store: thus hindered, haled this way
To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife?
—Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
The blows he dealt,—knowing anatomy,—
(I think I told you) bound to pick and choose
The vital parts! 'Twas learning all in vain!
She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,
Come and confront me—not at judgment-seat
Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
And turn her truth into a lie,—but there,
O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,
Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,
Tell her own story her own way, and turn
My plausibility to nothingness!
Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive,
With the best surgery of Rome agape
At the miracle,—this cut, the other slash,
And yet the life refusing to dislodge,
Four whole extravagant impossible days,
Till she had time to finish and persuade
Every man, every woman, every child
In Rome, of what she would: the selfsame she
Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands,
Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed
The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed
Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand!
When destiny intends you cards like these,
What good of skill and preconcerted play?
Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,
I should have told a tale brooked no reply:
You scarcely will suppose me found at fault
With that advantage! "What brings me to Rome?
"Necessity to claim and take my wife:
"Better, to claim and take my new-born babe,—
"Strong in paternity a fortnight old,
"When 'tis at strongest: warily I work,
"Knowing the machinations of my foe;
"I have companionship and use the night:
"I seek my wife and child,—I find—no child
"But wife, in the embraces of that priest
"Who caused her to elope from me. These two,
"Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while,
"Spring on me like so many tiger-cats,
"Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I—
"What should I do but stand on my defence,
"Strike right, strike left, strike thick and threefold, slay,
"Not all—because the coward priest escapes.
"Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,
"And having had my taste of Roman law."
What's disputable, refutable here?—
Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,
Half out of it,—as if she held God's hand

While she leant back and looked her last at me,
Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)
Oh, from her very soul, commending mine
To heavenly mercies which are infinite,—
While fixing fast my head beneath your knife!
'Tis fate not fortune. All is of a piece!
When was it chance informed me of my youths?
My rustic four o' the family, soft swains,
What sweet surprise had they in store for me,
Those of my very household,—what did Law
Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late
From out their bones and marrow? What but this—
Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks
Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme,
All of their honest country homespun wit,
To quietly next day at crow of cock
Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof,
Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts
O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that,—
And somehow never might find memory,
Once safe back in Arezzo, where things change,
And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.
Well, being the arch-offender, I die last,—
May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,
Nor miss them dangling high on either hand,
Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains!

And then my Trial,—'tis my Trial that bites
Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed,
Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away!
Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law,
Latin or logic? Were not they fools to the height,
Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,
O' the foolishness set to decide the case?
They feign, they flatter; nowise does it skill,
Everything goes against me: deal each judge
His dole of flattery and feigning,—why,
He turns and tries and snuffs and savours it,
As some old fly the sugar-grain, your gift;
Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean
The absurd old head of him, and whisks away,
Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh!
And finally, after this long-drawn range
Of affront and failure, failure and affront,—
This path, 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,
Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms
From the entry to the end,—there's light at length,
A cranny of escape: appeal may be
To the old man, to the father, to the Pope,
For a little life—from one whose life is spent,
A little pity—from pity's source and seat,
A little indulgence to rank, privilege,
From one who is the thing personified,
Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond
Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius[1] else!
Still the same answer, still no other tune
From the cicala perched at the tree-top
Than crickets noisy round the root: 'tis "Die!"
Bids Law—"Be damned!" adds Gospel,—nay,
No word so frank,—'tis rather, "Save yourself!"
The Pope subjoins—"Confess and be absolved!
"So shall my credit countervail your shame,
"And the world see I have not lost the knack
"Of trying all the spirits: yours, my son,
"Wants but a fiery washing to emerge
"In clarity! Come, cleanse you, ease the ache
"Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy!"
Do I mistake your mission from the Pope?
Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me!
I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
Successively wrenched from pillar and from post
By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
Of all things in, under, and above earth.
Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode,
Does best to end so,—gives earth spectacle
Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds
That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
My mantle round me! Rome approves my act:
Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps

[1] *Jansenius:* Cornelius Jansenius (1585–1638), from whom the Jansenists took their name; author of the work called *Augustinus*, condemned several popes in succession.

My honour spotless: Rome would praise no more
Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago,
Helping Vienna[1] when our Aretines
Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa;
Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse
With all this exquisite solicitude.
Why is it that I make such suit to live?
The popular sympathy that's round me now
Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly:
Solid enough while he lies quiet there,
But let him want the air and ply the wing,
Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else?
Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
It would not be your arm I should dare press!
Then, if I got safe to my place again,
How sad and sapless were the years to come!
I go my old ways and find things grown grey;
You priests leer at me, old friends look askance,
The mob's in love, I'll wager, to a man,
With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife:
For hearts require instruction how to beat,
And eyes, on warrant of the story, wax
Wanton at portraiture in white and black
Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet,
Which eyes, lived she unmurdered and unsung,
Would never turn though she paced street as bare
As the mad penitent ladies do in France.
My brothers quietly would edge me out
Of use and management of things called mine;
Do I command? "You stretched command before!"
Show anger? "Anger little helped you once!"
Advise? "How managed you affairs of old?"
My very mother, all the while they gird,
Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan;
For unsuccess, explain it how you will,
Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,
—Much more, is found decisive by your friends.
Beside, am I not fifty years of age?
What new leap would a life take, checked like mine
I' the spring at outset? Where's my second chance?
Ay, but the babe . . . I had forgot my son,
My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
There's some appropriate service to intone,
Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm!
Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
Possess a treasure,—is not that the phrase?
Only I must wait patient twenty years—
Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
The excrescence with my daily blood of life.
Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice,—
Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean?
Why, here's my son and heir in evidence,
Who stronger, wiser, handsomer than I
By fifty years, relieves me of each load,—
Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,
Courts my coy mistress,—has his apt advice
On house-economy, expenditure,
And what not. All which good gifts and great growth
Because of my decline, he brings to bear
On Guido, but half apprehensive how
He cumbers earth, crosses the brisk young Count,
Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.
Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail?
There's an ineptitude, one blank the more
Added to earth in semblance of my child?
Then, this has been a costly piece of work,
My life exchanged for his!—why he, not I,
Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue?
Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him?
I do not dread the disobedient son:
I know how to suppress rebellion there,
Being not quite the fool my father was.
But grant the medium measure of a man,
The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage,
—You know—the tolerably-obstinate,

[1] *Helping Vienna:* Vienna was besieged in 1683 by the Turks under Mahomet IV., and relieved by John Sobieski. Kara Mustafa was the Turkish grand-vizier and general. Duke Charles of Lorraine commanded part of the relieving forces.

The not-so-much-perverse but you may train,
The true son-servant that, when parent bids
"Go work, son, in my vineyard!" makes reply
"I go, Sir!"—Why, what profit in your son
Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,
Have the same work from, at a paul the head?
Look at those four young precious olive-plants
Reared at Vittiano,—not on flesh and blood,
These twenty years, but black bread and sour wine!
I bade them put forth tender branch, hook, hold,
And hurt three enemies I had in Rome:
They did my hest as unreluctantly,
At promise of a dollar, as a son
Adjured by mumping memories of the past.
No, nothing repays youth expended so—
Youth, I say, who am young still: grant but leave
To live my life out, to the last I'd live
And die conceding age no right of youth!
It is the will runs the renewing nerve
Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time.
Therefore no sort of use for son have I—
Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
To the house where life prepares her feast,—of means
To the end: for make the end attainable
Without the means,—my relish were like yours.
A man may have an appetite enough
For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,
And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,
And snare sufficiently for supper.

Thus
The time's arrived when, ancient Roman-like,
I am bound to fall on my own sword: why not
Say—Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still?
Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good?
I think I never was at any time
A Christian, as you nickname all the world,
Me among others: truce to nonsense now!
Name me, a primitive religionist—
As should the aboriginary be
I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine,
One sprung,—your frigid Virgil's fieriest word,[1]—
From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of oak,
With,—for a visible divinity,—
The portent of a Jove Ægiochus
Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder, couched
On topmost crag of your Capitoline:
'Tis in the Seventh Æneid,—what, the Eighth?
Right,—thanks, Abate,—though the Christian's dumb,
The Latinist's vivacious in you yet!
I know my grandsire had our tapestry
Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield,
Whereto his grandson presently will give gules
To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,
But get to shake hands at the last of all:
Mine's your faith too,—in Jove Ægiochus!
Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement,
Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.
We want such intermediary race
To make communication possible;
The real thing were too lofty, we too low,
Midway hang these: we feel their use so plain
In linking height to depth, that we doff hat
And put no question nor pry narrowly
Into the nature hid behind the names.
We grudge no rite the fancy may demand;
But never, more than needs, invent, refine,
Improve upon requirement, idly wise
Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,
Which is to teach us: we'll obey when taught.
Why should we do our duty past the need?
When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth,—say prayer!
When the sun shines and Jove is glad,—sing psalm!

[1] *Virgil's fieriest word: Æneid* VIII. 314, 315—
"Hæc nemora indigenæ Fauni Nymphæque tenebant,
Gensque virum truncis et duro robore nata."
The reference which follows is to ll. 351–353 of the same book.

But wherefore pass prescription and devise
Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod
A pungency through pickle of our own?
Learned Abate,—no one teaches you
What Venus means and who's Apollo here!
I spare you, Cardinal,—but, though you wince,
You know me, I know you, and both know that!
So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast,
But where does Venus order we stop sense
When Master Pietro[1] rhymes a pleasantry?
Give alms prescribed on Friday: but, hold hand
Because your foe lies prostrate,—where's the word
Explicit in the book debars revenge?
The rationale of your scheme is just
"Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free!"
So do you turn to use the medium-powers,
Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest,
And so are saved propitiating—whom?
What all-good, all-wise and all-potent Jove
Vexed by the very sins in man, himself
Made life's necessity when man he made?
Irrational bunglers! So, the living truth
Revealed to strike Pan dead,[2] ducks low at last,
Prays leave to hold its own and live good days
Provided it go masque grotesquely, called
Christian not Pagan. Oh, you purged the sky
Of all gods save the One, the great and good,
Clapped hands and triumphed! But the change came fast:
The inexorable need in man for life—
(Life, you may mulct and minish to a grain
Out of the lump, so that the grain but live)
Laughed at your substituting death for life,
And bade you do your worst: which worst was done
In just that age styled primitive and pure
When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,
Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused
And finally ridded of his flesh by fire,
He kept life-long unspotted from the world!
Next age, how goes the game, what mortal gives
His life and emulates Saint that, Saint this?
Men mutter, make excuse or mutiny,
In fine are minded all to leave the new,
Stick to the old,—enjoy old liberty,
No prejudice in enjoyment, if you please,
To the new profession: sin o' the sly, henceforth!
The law stands though the letter kills: what then?
The spirit saves as unmistakeably.
Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop,
Omnibenevolence pardons: it must be,
Frown law its fiercest, there's a wink somewhere!

Such was the logic in this head of mine:
I, like the rest, wrote "poison" on my bread,
But broke and ate:—said "Those that use the sword
"Shall perish by the same;" then stabbed my foe.
I stand on solid earth, not empty air:
Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence!
Not he, nor you! And I so pity both,
I'll make the true charge you want wit to make:
"Count Guido, who reveal our mystery,
"And trace all issues to the love of life:
"We having life to love and guard, like you,
"Why did you put us upon self-defence?
"You well knew what prompt pass-word would appease
"The sentry's ire when folk infringed his bounds,
"And yet kept mouth shut: do you wonder then
"If, in mere decency, he shot you dead?

[1] *Master Pietro:* Pietro Aretino. See note on X. 654.

[2] *Revealed to strike Pan dead:* an allusion to the legend that, at the hour of the Crucifixion, certain Greek sailors heard a voice proclaiming "Pan is dead."

"He can't have people play such pranks as yours
"Beneath his nose at noonday: you disdained
"To give him an excuse before the world
"By crying 'I break rule to save our camp!'
"Under the old rule, such offence were death;
"And you had heard the Pontifex pronounce
"'Since you slay foe and violate the form,
"'Slaying turns murder, which were sacrifice
"'Had you, while, say, law-suiting foe to death,
"'But raised an altar to the Unknown God
"'Or else the Genius of the Vatican.'
"Why then this pother?—all because the Pope,
"Doing his duty, cried 'A foreigner,
"'You scandalize the natives: here at Rome
"'*Romano vivitur more*:[1] wise men, here,
"'Put the Church forward and efface themselves.
"'The fit defence had been,—you stamped on wheat,
"'Intending all the time to trample tares,—
"'Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,
"'You now find, in your haste was slain a fool:
"'Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife
"'Meant to breed up your babe a Molinist!
"'Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word
"'Of all this wisdom did you urge: which slip
"'Death must atone for.'"
So, let death atone!
So ends mistake, so end mistakers!—end
Perhaps to recommence,—how should I know?
Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain
Childish, preposterous, impossible,
But some such fate as Ovid could foresee,—
Byblis in fluvium,[2] let the weak soul end
In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*, but
The strong become a wolf for evermore!
Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank!
Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,—
Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
Coerced too much by the humanity
That's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
Glut the wolf-nature,—what remains but grow
Into the man again, be man indeed
And all man? Do I ring the changes right?
Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!
The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,
Let surge by death into a visible flow
Of rapture: as the strangled thread of flame
Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,
Malignant and maligned, thro' stone and ore,
Till earth exclude the stranger: vented once,
It finds full play, is recognized a-top
Some mountain as no such abnormal birth,
Fire for the mount, not streamlet for the vale!
Ay, of the water was that wife of mine—
Be it for good, be it for ill, no run
O' the red thread through that insignificance!
Again, how she is at me with those eyes!
Away with the empty stare! Be holy still,
And stupid ever! Occupy your patch
Of private snow that's somewhere in what world
May now be growing icy round your head,
And aguish at your foot-print,—freeze not me,
Dare follow not another step I take,
Not with so much as those detested eyes,
No, though they follow but to pray me pause
On the incline, earth's edge that's next to hell!
None of your abnegation of revenge!
Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again!
There's God, go tell Him, testify your worst!
Not she! There was no touch in her of hate:
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!

[1] *Romano vivitur more*: "one does as Rome does."

[2] *Byblis in fluvium . . . Lycaon in lupum*: titles of transformations recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
Do what the angels might to make amends!
Therefore there's either no such place as hell,
Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,
And thereby undergo three hells, not one—
I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,
Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe
To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot
Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else!
So am I made, "who did not make myself:"
(How dared she rob my own lip of the word?)
Beware me in what other world may be!—
Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass!
All I know here, will I say there, and go
Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use
There cannot but be for a mood like mine,
Implacable, persistent in revenge.
She maundered "All is over and at end:
"I go my own road, go you where God will!
"Forgive you? I forget you!" There's the saint
That takes your taste, you other kind of men!
How you had loved her! Guido wanted skill
To value such a woman at her worth!
Properly the instructed criticize
"What's here, you simpleton have tossed to take
"Its chance i' the gutter? This a daub, indeed?
"Why, 'tis a Rafael that you kicked to rags!"
Perhaps so: some prefer the pure design:
Give me my gorge of colour, glut of gold
In a glory round the Virgin made for me!
Titian's the man, not Monk Angelico
Who traces you some timid chalky ghost
That turns the church into a charnel: ay,
Just such a pencil might depict my wife!
She,—since she, also, would not change herself,—
Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud,
Rainbowed about with riches, royalty
Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn
Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold?
I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched,
Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,
Let her bleach unmolested in the midst,
Chill that selected solitary spot
Of quietude she pleased to think was life.
Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt
When there's the costly bordure to unthread
And make again an ingot: but what's grace
When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire?
A tale comes to my mind that's apposite—
Possibly true, probably false, a truth
Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal!
'Tis said, a certain ancestor of mine
Followed—whoever was the potentate,
To Paynimrie, and in some battle, broke
Through more than due allowance of the foe,
And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.
Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up,
Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,
Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,
(Token how near the ground went majesty)
And says "Take this, and if thou get safe home,
"Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow:
"Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop:
"Describe a circle round (for central point)
"The furze aforesaid, reaching every way
"The length of that hour's run: I give it thee,—
"The central point, to build a castle there,
"The space circumjacent, for fit demesne,
"The whole to be thy children's heritage,—
"Whom, for thy sake, bid thou wear furze on cap!"
Those are my arms: we turned the furze a tree
To show more, and the greyhound tied thereto,

Straining to start, means swift and greedy both;
He stands upon a triple mount of gold—
By Jove, then, he's escaping from true gold
And trying to arrive at empty air!
Aha! the fancy never crossed my mind!
My father used to tell me, and subjoin
"As for the castle, that took wings and flew:
"The broad lands,—why, to traverse them to-day
"Scarce tasks my gouty feet, and in my prime
"I doubt not I could stand and spit so far:
"But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that,
"So long as fortune leaves one field to grub!
"Wherefore, hurra for furze and loyalty!"
What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk?
"Do not bestow on man, by way of gift,
"Furze without land for framework,—vaunt no grace
"Of purity, no furze-sprig of a wife,
"To me, i' the thick of battle for my bread,
"Without some better dowry,—gold will do!"
No better gift than sordid muck? Yes, Sirs!
Many more gifts much better. Give them me!
O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas brave,
That brought a husband power worth Ormuz' wealth!
Cried "Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I?
"Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell!
"Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid
"Two bodies work one pleasure! What are these
"Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend?
"They fret thee or they frustrate? Give the word—
"Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more!
"And who is this young florid foolishness
"That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,
"—Being a prince and potency, forsooth!—
"He hesitates to let the trifle go?
"Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep
"Sounder than Samson,—pounce thou on the prize
"Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side,
"And on to floor, and far as my lord's feet—
"Where he stands in the shadow with the knife,
"Waiting to see what Delilah dares do!
"Is the youth fair? What is a man to me
"Who am thy call-bird? Twist his neck—my dupe's,—
"Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed!"
Such women are there; and they marry whom?
Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself
Because of what he calls a wicked wife,—
See, if the very turpitude bemoaned
Prove not mere excellence the fool ignores!
His monster is perfection,—Circe, sent
Straight from the sun, with wand the idiot blames
As not an honest distaff to spin wool!
O thou Lucrezia,[1] is it long to wait
Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow
With thy suspected presence?—virgin yet,
Virtuous again, in face of what's to teach—
Sin unimagined, unimaginable,—
I come to claim my bride,—thy Borgia's self
Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be!
Cardinal, take away your crucifix!
Abate, leave my lips alone,—they bite!
Vainly you try to change what should not change,
And shall not. I have bared, you bathe my heart—
It grows the stonier for your saving dew!
You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
In waters that but touch to petrify!

You too are petrifactions of a kind:
Move not a muscle that shows mercy. Rave
Another twelve hours, every word were waste!
I thought you would not slay impenitence,
But teased, from men you slew, contrition first,—

[1] *Lucrezia:* Lucrezia Borgia.

I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,
You know I am wronged!—wronged, say, and wronged, maintain.
Was this strict inquisition made for blood
When first you showed us scarlet on your back,
Called to the College? Your straightforward way
To your legitimate end,—I think it passed
Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,
Lives trodden into dust! How otherwise?
Such was the way o' the world, and so you walked.
Does memory haunt your pillow? Not a whit.
God wills you never pace your garden-path,
One appetizing hour ere dinner-time,
But your intrusion there treads out of life
A universe of happy innocent things:
Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly
Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face?
You blotted it from being at a blow:
It was a fly, you were a man, and more,
Lord of created things, so took your course.
Manliness, mind,—these are things fit to save,
Fit to brush fly from: why, because I take
My course, must needs the Pope kill me?—kill you!
You! for this instrument, he throws away,
Is strong to serve a master, and were yours
To have and hold and get much good from out!
The Pope who dooms me needs must die next year;
I'll tell you how the chances are supposed
For his successor: first the Chamberlain,
Old San Cesario,—Colloredo, next,—
Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name;
After these, comes Altieri; then come you—
Seventh on the list you come, unless . . . ha, ha,
How can a dead hand give a friend a lift?
Are you the person to despise the help
O' the head shall drop in pannier presently?
So a child seesaws on or kicks away
The fulcrum-stone that's all the sage requires
To fit his lever to and move the world.
Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,
Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth
Things your own fashion, not in words like these
Made for a sense like yours who apprehend!
Translate into the Court-conventional
"Count Guido must not die, is innocent!
"Fair, be assured! But what an he were foul,
"Blood-drenched and murder-crusted head to foot?
"Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,
"Nay, outrages the Louis you so love!
"He has friends who will avenge him; enemies
"Who will hate God now with impunity,
"Missing the old coercive: would you send
"A soul straight to perdition, dying frank
"An atheist?" Go and say this, for God's sake!
—Why, you don't think I hope you'll say one word?
Neither shall I persuade you from your stand
Nor you persuade me from my station: take
Your crucifix away, I tell you twice!

Come, I am tired of silence! Pause enough!
You have prayed: I have gone inside my soul
And shut its door behind me: 'tis your torch
Makes the place dark: the darkness let alone
Grows tolerable twilight: one may grope
And get to guess at length and breadth and depth.
What is this fact I feel persuaded of—
This something like a foothold in the sea,
Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,
Leaves me to founder where it flung me first?
Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry!
God takes his own part in each thing He made;
Made for a reason, He conserves his work,
Gives each its proper instinct of defence.
My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure
The village roused up, ran with pole and prong
To the rescue, and behold the wolf's at bay!

Shall he try bleating?—or take turn or two,
Since the wolf owns some kinship with the fox,
And, failing to escape the foe by craft,
Give up attempt, die fighting quietly?
The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye
And on to brain, and so out, life and all,
How can it but be cheated of a pang
If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy
One re-embrace in mid back-bone they break,
After their weary work thro' the foe's flesh?
That's the wolf-nature. Don't mistake my trope!
A Cardinal so qualmish? Eminence,
My fight is figurative, blows i' the air,
Brain-war with powers and principalities,
Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs!
I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,
No, trust me! I conceive worse lots than mine.
Whether it be, the old contagious fit
And plague o' the prison have surprised me too,
The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and myrrh,—
I know not,—I begin to taste my strength,
Careless, gay even. What's the worth of life?
The Pope's dead now, my murderous old man,
For Tozzi told me so: and you, forsooth—
Why, you don't think, Abate, do your best,
You'll live a year more with that hacking cough
And blotch of crimson where the cheek's a pit?
Tozzi has got you also down in book!
Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,
Is not one called Albano[1] in the lot?
Go eat your heart, you'll never be a Pope!
Inform me, is it true you left your love,
A Pucci, for promotion in the church?
She's more than in the church,—in the churchyard!

[1] *One called Albano:* the next pope was Giovanni Francisco Albani.

Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,—
And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,
Stops that with *veto*,—so, enjoy yourself!
I see you all reel to the rock, you waves—
Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,
Some, crested brilliantly, with heads above,
Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,
But all bound whither the main-current sets,
Rockward, an end in foam for all of you!
What if I be o'ertaken, pushed to the front
By all you crowding smoother souls behind,
And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,
The boundary whereon I break to mist?
Go to! the smoothest safest of you all,
Most perfect and compact wave in my train,
Spite of the blue tranquillity above,
Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace,
Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free,
Will presently begin to feel the prick
At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,
Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel,
And, emulative, rush to death like me.
Later or sooner by a minute then,
So much for the untimeliness of death!
And, as regards the manner that offends,
The rude and rough, I count the same for gain.
Be the act harsh and quick! Undoubtedly
The soul's condensed and, twice itself, expands
To burst thro' life, by alternation due,
Into the other state whate'er it prove.
You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.
For see, on your own ground and argument,
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What's love, what's faith without a worst to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die—

Put such a foil at back, the sparkle's born!
From out myself how the strange colours come!
Is there a new rule in another world?
Be sure I shall resign myself: as here
I recognized no law I could not see,
There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too:
On earth I never took the Pope for God,
In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.
Unmanned, remanned: I hold it probable—
With something changeless at the heart of me
To know me by, some nucleus that's myself:
Accretions did it wrong? Away with them—
You soon shall see the use of fire!

Till when,
All that was, is; and must forever be.
Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,—
I use up my last strength to strike once more
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
To trample underfoot the whine and wile
Of beast Violante,—and I grow one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
How else lived that Athenian[1] who died so,
Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
Honest and bold: right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's!
Abate, — Cardinal, — Christ, — Maria, — God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

[1] *That Athenian:* Themistocles, who was said to have killed himself by drinking bull's blood, which the ancients believed to be a poison.

XII.—THE BOOK AND THE RING.

Here were the end, had anything an end:
Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,
In brilliant usurpature: thus caught spark,
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,
Our glaring Guido: now decline must be.
In its explosion, you have seen his act,
By my power—may-be, judged it by your own,—
Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed
With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.[2]
The act, over and ended, falls and fades:
What was once seen, grows what is now described,
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less
In every fresh transmission; till it melts,
Trickles in silent orange or wan grey
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,
And presently we find the stars again.
Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode
Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black!

[2] *The Wormwood Star:* Rev. viii. 11.

After that February Twenty-Two,
Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,
Of all reports that were, or may have been,
Concerning those the day killed or let live,
Four I count only. Take the first that comes.
A letter from a stranger, man of rank,
Venetian visitor at Rome,—who knows,
On what pretence of busy idleness?
Thus he begins on evening of that day.

"Here are we at our end of Carnival;
"Prodigious gaiety and monstrous mirth,
"And constant shift of entertaining show:
"With influx, from each quarter of the globe,
"Of strangers nowise wishful to be last
"I' the struggle for a good place presently
"When that befalls fate cannot long defer.
"The old Pope totters on the verge o' the grave:
"You see, Malpichi understood far more
"Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments: age,
"No question, renders these inveterate.
"Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,
"Is possible Pope; I wager on his head,
"Since those four entertainments of his niece
"Which set all Rome a-stare: Pope probably—
"Though Colloredo has his backers too,
"And San Cesario makes one doubt at times:
"Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.

"A week ago the sun was warm like May,
"And the old man took daily exercise
"Along the river-side; he loves to see
"That Custom-house he built upon the bank,
"For, Naples born, his tastes are maritime:
"But yesterday he had to keep in-doors
"Because of the outrageous rain that fell.
"On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,
"Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe
"Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.
"They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive
"Is that, by lasting till December next,
"He may hold Jubilee a second time,
"And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.
"By the way, somebody responsible
"Assures me that the King of France has writ
"Fresh orders: Fénelon will be condemned:[1]
"The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,
"Having a love for the delinquent: still,
"He's the ambassador, must press the point.
"Have you a wager too, dependent here?

"Now, from such matters to divert awhile,
"Hear of to-day's event which crowns the week,
"Casts all the other wagers into shade.
"Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops
"Of heart's blood in the shape of gold zecchines!
"The Pope has done his worst: I have to pay
"For the execution of the Count, by Jove!
"Two days since, I reported him as safe,
"Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome:
"Who could suspect its one deaf ear—the Pope's?
"But prejudices grow insuperable,
"And that old enmity to Austria, that
"Passion for France and France's pageant-king
"(Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs
"Now scandalously rife in Europe's mouth?)
"These fairly got the better in our man
"Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
"And he persisted in the butchery.
"Also, 'tis said that in his latest walk
"To that Dogana-by-the-Bank he built,
"The crowd,—he suffers question, unrebuked,—
"Asked, 'Whether murder was a privilege
"'Only reserved for nobles like the Count?'
"And he was ever mindful of the mob.
"Martinez, the Cæsarian Minister,
"—Who used his best endeavours to spare blood,
"And strongly pleaded for the life 'of one,'
"Urged he, 'I may have dined at table with!'—
"He will not soon forget the Pope's rebuff,
"—Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you!
"And but for the dissuasion of two eyes

[1] *Fénelon will be condemned:* Fénelon's *Explication des Maximes des Saints* was condemned by Pope Innocent in 1699 for its advocacy of Quietism.

"That make with him foul weather or fine day,
"He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle:
"As it was, barely would he condescend
"Look forth from the *palchetto*[1] where he sat
"Under the Pincian: we shall hear of this.
"The substituting, too, the People's Square
"For the out-o'-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,
"Was meant as a conciliatory sop
"To the mob; it gave one holiday the more.
"But the French Embassy might unfurl flag,—
"Still the good luck of France to fling a foe!
"Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly.
"*Palchetti* were erected in the Place,
"And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,
"Let their front windows at six dollars each:
"Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,
"Hired one; our Envoy Contarini too.

"Now for the thing; no sooner the decree
"Gone forth,—'tis four-and-twenty hours ago,—
"Than Acciaiuoli and Panciatichi,
"Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,
"Being pitched on as the couple properest
"To intimate the sentence yesternight,
"Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.
"They both report their efforts to dispose
"The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
"Despite the natural sense of injury,
"Were crowned at last with a complete success.
"And when the Company of Death arrived
"At twenty-hours,—the way they reckon here,—
"We say, at sunset, after dinner-time,—
"The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
"Last of the five, as heinousest, you know:
"Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.
"His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance,
"As up he stood and down he sat himself,
"Struck admiration into those who saw.

"Then the procession started, took the way
"From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim's Street,
"The street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street,
"(Where was stuck up, 'mid other epigrams,
"A quatrain . . . but of all that, presently!)
"The Place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
"Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
"And so debouched thence at Mannaia's foot
"I' the Place o' the People. As is evident,
"(Despite the malice,—plainly meant, I fear,
"By this abrupt change of locality,—
"The Square's no such bad place to head and hang)
"We had the titillation as we sat
"Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
"Of, minute after minute, some report
"How the slow show was winding on its way.
"Now did a car run over, kill a man,
"Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve:
"And bitter were the outcries of the mob
"Against the Pope: for, but that he forbids
"The Lottery, why, Twelve were Tern Quatern!
"Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
"From his youth up, recover use of leg,
"Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way:
"So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.
"Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
"—Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
"From Castle, over Bridge and on to block,
"And so all ended ere you well could wink!

"To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
"Here also, as atrociousest in crime.
"We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
"They dangled somehow soon to right and left,
"And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
"Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
"As he harangued the multitude beneath.
"He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
"And fair construction of his act from men,

[1] *Palchetto:* stage or scaffold.

"Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
"Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
"A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
"*Salve Regina Cœli*, for his sake.
"Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed
"And reconciled himself, with decency,
"Oft glancing at Saint Mary's opposite,
"Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,
"The blessed *Umbilicus* of our Lord,
"(A relic 'tis believed no other church
"In Rome can boast of)—then rose up, as brisk
"Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
"And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
"Received the fatal blow.

"The headsman showed
"The head to the populace. Must I avouch
"We strangers own to disappointment here?
"Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
"Youngish, considering his fifty years,
"And, if not handsome, dignified at least.
"Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!
"His friends say, this was caused by the costume:
"He wore the dress he did the murder in,
"That is, a *just-a-corps* of russet serge,
"Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan
"(So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth)
"White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count,
"Preservative against the evening dews
"During the journey from Arezzo. Well,
"So died the man, and so his end was peace;
"Whence many a moral were to meditate.
"Spada,—you may bet Dandolo,—is Pope!
"Now for the quatrain!"

No, friend, this will do!
You've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes next?
A letter: Don Giacinto Arcangeli,
Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark
Buckle to business in his study late,
The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,
Acquaints his correspondent,—Florentine,
By name Cencini, advocate as well,
Socius and brother-in-the-devil to match,—
A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,
And knit up with the bowels of the case,—
Acquaints him, (in this paper that I touch)
How their joint effort to obtain reprieve
For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine
And ninety and one over,—folk would say
At Tarocs,—or succeeded,—in our phrase.
To this Cencini's care I owe the Book,
The yellow thing I take and toss once more,—
How will it be, my four-years'-intimate,
When thou and I part company anon?—
'Twas he, the "whole position of the case,"
Pleading and summary, were put before;
Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,
Adding some three epistles to the point.
Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,
The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,
Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed:
Part—extant just as plainly, you know where,
Whence came the other stuff, went, you know how,
To make the Ring that's all but round and done.

"Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,
"Those same justificative points you urge
"Might benefit His Blessed Memory
"Count Guido Franceschini now with God:
"Since the Court,—to state things succinctly,—styled
"The Congregation of the Governor,
"Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause
"I' the guilty sense, with death for punishment,
"Spite of all pleas by me deducible
"In favour of said Blessed Memory,—
"I, with expenditure of pains enough,
"Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove
"Exemption from the law's award,—alleged
"The power and privilege o' the Clericate:
"To which effect a courier was despatched.
"But ere an answer from Arezzo came,

"The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare !)
"Judging it inexpedient to postpone
"The execution of such sentence passed,
"Saw fit, by his particular cheirograph,
"To derogate, dispense with privilege,
"And wink at any hurt accruing thence
"To Mother Church through damage of her son :
"Also, to overpass and set aside
"That other plea on score of tender age,
"Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,
"One of the four in trouble with our friend.
"So that all five, to-day, have suffered death
"With no distinction save in dying,—he,
"Decollate by mere due of privilege,
"The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus
"Came the Count to his end of gallant man,
"Defunct in faith and exemplarity :
"Nor shall the shield of his great House lose shine
"Thereby, nor its blue banner blush to red.
"This, too, should yield sustainment to our hearts—
"He had commiseration and respect
"In his decease from universal Rome,
"*Quantum est hominum venustiorum*,[1]
"The nice and cultivated everywhere :
"Though, in respect of me his advocate,
"Needs must I groan o'er my debility,
"Attribute the untoward event o' the strife
"To nothing but my own crass ignorance
"Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,
"Find fit excuse : such is the fate of war !
"May God compensate us the direful blow
"By future blessings on his family,
"Whereof I lowly beg the next commands ;
"—Whereto, as humbly, I confirm myself . . ."

And so forth,—follow name and place and date.
On next leaf—
"*Hactenus senioribus !*
"There, old fox, show the clients t'other side

"And keep this corner sacred, I beseech !
"You and your pleas and proofs were what folk call
"Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late,
"Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.
"Had I but time and space for narrative !
"What was the good of twenty Clericates
"When Somebody's thick headpiece once was bent
"On seeing Guido's drop into the bag ?
"How these old men like giving youth a push !
"So much the better : next push goes to him,
"And a new Pope begins the century.
"Much good I get by my superb defence !
"But argument is solid and subsists,
"While obstinacy and ineptitude
"Accompany the owner to his tomb—
"What do I care how soon ? Beside, folk see !
"Rome will have relished heartily the show,
"Yet understood the motives, never fear,
"Which caused the indecent change o' the People's Place
"To the People's Playground,—stigmatize the spite
"Which in a trice precipitated things !
"As oft the moribund will give a kick
"To show they are not absolutely dead,
"So feebleness i' the socket shoots its last,
"A spirt of violence for energy !

"But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast,
"O fox whose home is 'mid the tender grape,
"Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis' throne,
"Subject to no such . . . best I shut my mouth
"Or only open it again to say,
"This pother and confusion fairly laid,
"My hands are empty and my satchel lank.
"Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause
"And the Case of Gomez ! Serve them hot and hot !

"*Reliqua differamus in crastinum !*[2]
"The impatient estafette cracks whip outside :

[1] *Quantum est*, &c. : "all the world of cultivated men,"—from Catullus, 3, 2.

[2] *Reliqua*, &c. : "the rest let us postpone till to-morrow."

"Still, though the earth should swallow him who swears
"And me who make the mischief, in must slip—
"My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,
"Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.
"I promised him, the rogue, a month ago,
"The day his birthday was, of all the days,
"That if I failed to save Count Guido's head,
"Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped
"From trunk—'So, latinize your thanks!' quoth I.
"'That I prefer, *hoc malim*,' raps me out
"The rogue: you notice the subjunctive? Ah!
"Accordingly he sat there, bold in box,
"Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans:
"Whereon a certain lady-patroness
"For whom I manage things (my boy in front,
"Her Marquis sat the third in evidence;
"Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show)
"'This time, Cintino,' was her sportive word,
"When whiz and thump went axe and mowed lay man,
"And folk could fall to the suspended chat,
"'This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,
"'Nor can Papa with all his eloquence
"'Be reckoned on to help as heretofore!'
"Whereat Cinone pouts; then, sparkishly—
"'Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope,
"'And baulk him of his grudge against our Count,
"'Else he'd have argued-off Bottini's' . . . what?
"'His nose,'—the rogue! well parried of the boy!
"He's long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)
"And as for tripping in Eutropius . . . well,
"Reason the more that we strain every nerve
"To do him justice, mould a model-mouth,
"A Bartolus-cum-Baldo for next age:
"For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,
"And want both Gomez and the marriage-case,
"Success with which shall plaster aught of pate
"That's broken in me by Bottini's flail,
"And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.
"*Adverti supplico humiliter*
"*Quod*[1] don't the fungus see, the fop divine
"That one hand drives two horses, left and right?
"With this rein did I rescue from the ditch
"The fortune of our Franceschini, keep
"Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,
"And set the fashionable cause at Rome
"A-prancing till bystanders shouted "'ware!'
"The other rein's judicious management
"Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,
"Hobblingly play the roadster: who but he
"Had his opinion, was not led by the nose
"In leash of quibbles strung to look like law!
"You'll soon see,—when I go to pay devoir
"And compliment him on confuting me,—
"If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,
"Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent.
"'I must decide as I see proper, Don!
"'I'm Pope, I have my inward lights for guide.
"'Had learning been the matter in dispute,
"'Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,
"'Yours were the victory, be comforted!'
"Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.
"Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case!"

Follows, a letter, takes the other side.
Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with cloud,
Doctor Bottini,—to no matter who,
Writes on the Monday two days afterward.
Now shall the honest championship of right,
Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,
Moderate triumph! Now shall eloquence

[1] *Adverti*, &c.: "I humbly beg that it may be noticed."

Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue's sake,
The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,
But shows where fain the unbridled force would flow,
Finding a channel)—now shall this refresh
The thirsty donor with a drop or two!
Here has been truth at issue with a lie:
Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride
In his own prowess! Eh! What ails the man?

'Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw:
'Easily proved, Pompilia's innocence!
'Catch them entrusting Guido's guilt to me
'Who had, as usual, the plain truth to plead.
'I always knew the clearness of the stream
'Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might prong
'The clumsy monster: with no mud to splash,
'Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear!
'This Guido,—(much sport he contrived to make,
'Who at first twist, preamble of the cord,
'Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he was!)—
'Finished, as you expect, a penitent,
'Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,
'And, edifying Rome last Saturday,
'Died like a saint, poor devil! That's the man
'The gods still give to my antagonist:
'Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing
'And crows! 'Such formidable facts to face,
'So naked to attack, my client here,
'And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay,
'And in the end had foiled him of the prize
'By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,
'But that the Pope must gratify his whim,
'Put in his word, poor old man,—let it pass!'
—Such is the cue to which all Rome responds.

"What with the plain truth given me to uphold,
"And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand
"To pick up, steady her on legs again,
"My office turns a pleasantry indeed!
"Not that the burly boaster did one jot
"O' the little was to do—young Spreti's work!
"But for him,—mannikin and dandiprat,
"Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness
"Stuck on Arcangeli's save-all,—but for him
"The spruce young Spreti, what is bad were worse!

"I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
"At advocate with case that proves itself;
"I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag:
"But what say you to one impertinence
"Might move a stone? That monk, you are to know,
"That barefoot Augustinian whose report
"O' the dying woman's words did detriment
"To my best points it took the freshness from,
"—That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
"At San Lorenzo as a winding-up
"O' the show which proved a treasure to the church.
"Out comes his sermon smoking from the press:
"Its text—'Let God be true, and every man
"'A liar'—and its application, this
"The longest-winded of the paragraphs,
"I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with:
"'Tis piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.
"Remember it, as I engage to do!

"But if you rather be disposed to see
"In the result of the long trial here,—
"This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise
"To innocency,—any proof that truth
"May look for vindication from the world,

"Much will you have misread the signs, I say.
"God, who seems acquiescent in the main
"With those who add 'So will he ever sleep'—
"Flutters their foolishness from time to time,
"Puts forth His right-hand recognizably;
"Even as, to fools who deem He needs must right
"Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven,
"He wakes remonstrance—'Passive, Lord, how long?'
"Because Pompilia's purity prevails,
"Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end?
"So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
"Witnessing haply their dove's safe return,
"Pronounce there was no danger, all the while
"O' the deluge, to the creature's counterparts,
"Aught that beat wing i' the world, was white or soft,—
"And that the lark, the thrush, the culver[1] too,
"Might equally have traversed air, found earth,
"And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
"Methinks I hear the Patriarch's warning voice—
"'Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
"'No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
"'Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear,
"'Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed!'
"How many chaste and noble sister-fames
"Wanted the extricating hand, so lie
"Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above
"The welter, plucked from the world's calumny,
"Stupidity, simplicity,—who cares?

"Romans! An elder race possessed your land
"Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,
"As shades do, though the morning-star be out.

[1] *Culver:* wood-pigeon.

"Doubtless some pagan of the twilight-day
"Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth
"Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
"And said,—nor he a bad man, no, nor fool,
"Only a man born blind like all his mates,—
"'Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law,
"'The devotees to execrable creed,
"'Adoring—with what culture . . . Jove, avert
"'Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee! . . .
"'What rites obscene—their idol-god, an Ass!'
"So went the word forth, so acceptance found,
"So century re-echoed century,
"Cursed the accursed,—and so, from sire to son,
"You Romans cried 'The offscourings of our race
"'Corrupt within the depths there: fitly fiends
"'Perform a temple-service o'er the dead:
"'Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry!'
"Thus groaned your generations: till the time
"Grew ripe, and lightning had revealed, belike,—
"Thro' crevice peeped into by curious fear,—
"Some object even fear could recognize
"I' the place of spectres; on the illumined wall,
"To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about,
"Narrow and short, a corpse's length, no more:
"And by it, in the due receptacle,
"The little rude brown lamp of earthenware,
"The cruse, was meant for flowers but now held blood,
"The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the legend left
"*Pro Christo.* Then the mystery lay clear
"The abhorred one was a martyr all the time
"Heaven's saint whereof earth was no worthy. What?
"Do you continue in the old belief?
"Where blackness bides unbroke, mus devils brood?
"Is it so certain not another cell

"O' the myriad that make up the catacomb
"Contains some saint a second flash would show?
"Will you ascend into the light of day
"And, having recognized a martyr's shrine,
"Go join the votaries that gape around
"Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?
"Are these the objects of your praising? See!
"In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there,
"Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds
"Of Juno's mantle lurks a centipede!
"Each statue of a god were fitlier styled
"Demon and devil. Glorify no brass
"That shines like burnished gold in noonday glare,
"For fools! Be otherwise instructed, you!
"And preferably ponder, ere ye judge,
"Each incident of this strange human play
"Privily acted on a theatre
"That seemed secure from every gaze but God's,—
"Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low
"And let the world perceive wild work inside
"And how, in petrifaction of surprise,
"The actors stood,—raised arm and planted foot,—
"Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,
"Despairing shriek, triumphant hate,—transfixed,
"Both he who takes and she who yields the life.

"As ye become spectators of this scene,
"Watch obscuration of a pearl-pure fame
"By vapoury films, enwoven circumstance,
"—A soul made weak by its pathetic want
"Of just the first apprenticeship to sin
"Which thenceforth makes the sinning soul secure
"From all foes save itself, souls' truliest foe,—
"Since egg turned snake needs fear no serpentry,—
"As ye behold this web of circumstance
"Deepen the more for every thrill and throe,
"Convulsive effort to disperse the films
"And disenmesh the fame o' the martyr,—mark
"How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,
"To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,
"Each struggle in the flight from death to life,
"How all, by procuration of the powers
"Of darkness, are transformed,—no single ray,
"Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,
"But, passed as through hell's prism, proceeding black
"To the world that hates white: as ye watch, I say,
"Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse
"By,—marvellous perversity of man!—
"The inadequacy and inaptitude
"Of that self-same machine, that very law
"Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,
"Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,
"—Hear law, appointed to defend the just,
"Submit, for best defence, that wickedness
"Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone
"Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space,
"And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief:
"Finally, when ye find,—after this touch
"Of man's protection which intends to mar
"The last pin-point of light and damn the disc,—
"One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds
"Bid vapour vanish, darkness flee away,
"And let the vexed star culminate in peace
"Approachable no more by earthly mist—
"What I call God's hand,—you, perhaps,—mere chance
"Of the true instinct of an old good man
"Who happens to hate darkness and love light,—
"In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim,
"The natural force to do the thing he saw,
"Nowise abated,—both by miracle,—
"All this well pondered,—I demand assent

"To the enunciation of my text
"In face of one proof more that 'God is true
"'And every man a liar'—that who trusts
"To human testimony for a fact
"Gets this sole fact—himself is proved a fool;
"Man's speech being false, if but by consequence
"That only strength is true: while man is weak,
"And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,
"Plagued here by earth's prerogative of lies,
"Should learn to love and long for what, one day,
"Approved by life's probation, he may speak.

"For me, the weary and worn, who haply prompt
"To mirth or pity, as I move the mood,—
"A friar who glides unnoticed to the grave,
"With these bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt waist,—
"I have long since renounced your world, ye know:
"Yet what forbids I weigh the prize forgone,
"The worldly worth? I dare, as I were dead,
"Disinterestedly judge this and that
"Good ye account good: but God tries the heart.
"Still, if you question me of my content
"At having put each human pleasure by,
"I answer, at the urgency of truth:
"As this world seems, I dare not say I know
"—Apart from Christ's assurance which decides—
"Whether I have not failed to taste much joy.
"For many a doubt will fain perturb my choice—
"Many a dream of life spent otherwise—
"How human love, in varied shapes, might work
"As glory, or as rapture, or as grace:
"How conversancy with the books that teach,
"The arts that help,—how, to grow good and great,
"Rather than simply good, and bring thereby
"Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i' the brain,
"Die there,—how these and many another gift
"Of life are precious though abjured by me.
"But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man,
"Arch-object of ambition,—earthly praise,
"Repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump,
"The softer social fluting,—Oh, for these,
"—No, my friends! Fame,—that bubble which, world-wide
"Each blows and bids his neighbour lend a breath,
"That so he haply may behold thereon
"One more enlarged distorted false fool's-face,
"Until some glassy nothing grown as big
"Send by a touch the imperishable to suds,—
"No, in renouncing fame, my loss was light,
"Choosing obscurity, my chance was well!"

Didst ever touch such ampollosity
As the monk's own bubble, let alone its spite?
What's his speech for, but just the fame he flouts?
How he dares reprehend both high and low,
Nor stoops to turn the sentence "God is true
"And every man a liar—save the Pope
"Happily reigning—my respects to him!"
And so round off the period. Molinism
Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next?
I find that, for first pleasant consequence,
Gomez, who had intended to appeal
From the absurd decision of the Court,
Declines, though plain enough his privilege,
To call on help from lawyers any more—
Resolves earth's liars may possess the world
Till God have had sufficiency of both:
So may I whistle for my job and fee!

But, for this virulent and rabid monk,—
If law be an inadequate machine,
And advocacy, froth and impotence,
We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That's
Exactly what I hope to show your sort!

For, by a veritable piece of luck,
The providence, you monks round period with,
All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend!
That Monastery of the Convertites
Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first,
—Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then,
Or what's the pertinency of award?—
And whither she was late returned to die,
—Still in their jurisdiction, mark again!—
That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite,
Claims every piece whereof may die possessed
Each sinner in the circuit of its walls.
Now, this Pompilia seeing that, by death
O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,
Straight utilized the respite ere decease,
By regular conveyance of the goods
She thought her own, to will and to devise,—
Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,
In trust for him she held her son and heir,
Gaetano,—trust which ends with infancy:
So willing and devising, since assured
The justice of the Court would presently
Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,
Re-integrate and rehabilitate—
Place her as, through my pleading, now she stands.
But here's the capital mistake: the Court
Found Guido guilty,—but pronounced no word
About the innocency of his wife:
I grounded charge on broader base, I hope!
No matter whether wife be true or false,
The husband must not push aside the law,
And punish of a sudden: that's the point:
Gather from out my speech the contrary!
It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved
By formal sentence from imputed fault,
Remains unfit to have and to dispose
Of property which law provides shall lapse.
Wherefore the Monastery claims its due:
And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's?
Who but I institute procedure next
Against the person of dishonest life,
Pompilia whom last week I sainted so?
I it is teach the monk what scripture means,
And that the tongue should prove a two-edged sword,
No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way,
Like what amused the town at Guido's cost!
Astræa redux! I've a second chance
Before the self-same Court o' the Governor
Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change sides.
Accordingly, I charge you on your life,
Send me with all despatch the judgment late
O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative
O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched
Again by the Granducal signature,
Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,
And only destined to escape through flight
The proper punishment. Send me the piece,—
I'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back
Turn into quite the other sooty scout,
The raven, Noah first put forth the ark,
Which never came back but ate carcasses!
No adequate machinery in law?
No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
Methinks I am already at my speech,
Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus?
"How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!"
And so forth. But the courier bids me close,
And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,
Side by side with the sermon which I send.
How like the heartlessness of the old hunks
Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold,
The client whom his blunders sacrificed,
When somebody must needs describe the scene—
How the procession ended at the church
That boasts the famous relic:[1] quoth our brute,

[1] *The famous relic:* see line 184. *Umbilicus* also means an ornamental knob at the end of the stick round which books, in Greek and Roman times, used to be rolled; hence the phrase *ad umbilicum pervenire* (Martial, iv. 89) meant "to reach the end" of a book.

"Why, that's just Martial's phrase for 'make an end'—
"*Ad umbilicum sic perventum est!*"
The callous dog,—let who will cut off head,
He cuts a joke and cares no more than so!
I think my speech shall modify his mirth.
"How is the fine gold dim!"—but send the piece!

Alack, Bottini, what is my next word
But death to all that hope? The Instrument
Is plain before me, print that ends my Book
With the definitive verdict of the Court,
Dated September, six months afterward,
(Such trouble and so long the old Pope gave!)
"In restitution of the perfect fame
"Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido's wife,
"And warrant to her representative
"Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby,
"While doing duty in his guardianship,
"From all molesting, all disquietude,
"Each perturbation and vexation brought
"Or threatened to be brought against the heir
"By the Most Venerable Convent called
"Saint Mary Magdalen o' the Convertites
"I' the Corso."
Justice done a second time!
Well judged, Marc Antony, *Locum-tenens*
O' the Governor, a Venturini too!
For which I save thy name,—last of the list!

Next year but one, completing his nine years
Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope
—By some account, on his accession-day.
If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
'Tis pity he died unapprised what birth
His reign may boast of, be remembered by—
Terrible Pope, too, of a kind,—Voltaire.

And so an end of all i' the story. Strain
Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark
If lived or died that Gaetano, child
Of Guido and Pompilia: only find,
Immediately upon his father's death,
A record, in the annals of the town—
That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved
The Priors of Arezzo and their head
Its Gonfalonier to give loyally
A public attestation of the right
O' the Franceschini to all reverence—
Apparently because of the incident
O' the murder,—there's no mention made o' the crime,
But what else could have caused such urgency
To cure the mob, just then, of greediness
For scandal, love of lying vanity,
And appetite to swallow crude reports
That bring annoyance to their betters?—bane
Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.
I like and shall translate the eloquence
Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ:
"Since antique time whereof the memory
"Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
"The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
"Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
"The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own
"In this great family, the flag-bearer,
"Guide of her steps and guardian against foe,—
"As in the first beginning, so to-day!"
There, would you disbelieve the annalist,
Go rather by the babble of a bard?
I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls,
Petrarch,[1]—nay, Buonarroti at a pinch,
To do thee credit as *vexillifer!*[2]
Was it mere mirth the Patavinian[3] meant,
Making thee out, in his veracious page,
Founded by Janus of the Double Face?

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,
Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,
Did the babe live or die? I fain would find!
What were his fancies if he grew a man?
Was he proud,—a true scion of the stock
Which bore the blazon, shall make bright my page—
Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,
A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied
A Greyhound, Rampant, striving in the slips?

[1] Petrarch was born in the town of Arezzo, and Buonarroti (Michel Angelo) in the territory, though not in the town itself.
[2] *Vexillifer:* standard-bearer.
[3] *The Patavinian:* Livy.

Or did he love his mother, the base-born,
And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world?

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost.
So did this old woe fade from memory:
Till after, in the fulness of the days,
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man.

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach:
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.
Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.
How look a brother in the face and say
"Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,
"Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length:
"And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!"
Say this as silverly as tongue can troll—
The anger of the man may be endured,
The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
Are not so bad to bear—but here's the plague
That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
Nor recognizable by whom it left:
While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
But Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,
Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,—
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul! If this intent save mine,—
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet[1] praised)
Linking our England to his Italy!

[1] *The poet:* Tommaseo, who wrote the inscription on the tablet placed on the walls of Casa Guidi by the municipality of Florence to the memory of Mrs. Browning: "Qui scrisse e morì E. B. Browning, che . . . fece del suo verso aureo anello fra Italia e Inghilterra."

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,

SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

1871.

[The Prince stands for the Third Napoleon, the author—it may be the unwilling author—of the *coup d'état* of December 1851. For eighteen years he was Emperor of the French, the ally of Great Britain, and to some extent the Liberator of Italy. He and his came to an end at Sedan in 1870.]

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,

SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

Ὕδραν φονεύσας, μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων
διῆλθον ἀγέλας . . .
τὸ λοίσθιον δὲ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον,
. . . δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς.

I slew the Hydra, and from labour pass'd
To labour—tribes of labours! Till, at last,
Attempting one more labour, in a trice,
Alack, with ills I *crowned the edifice.*

You have seen better days, dear? So have I—
And worse too, for they brought no such bud-mouth
As yours to lisp "You wish you knew me!" Well,
Wise men, 'tis said, have sometimes wished the same,
And wished and had their trouble for their pains.
Suppose my Œdipus should lurk at last
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline,
And, lateish, pounce on Sphynx in Leicester Square?
Or likelier, what if Sphynx in wise old age,
Grown sick of snapping foolish people's heads,
And jealous for her riddle's proper rede,—
Jealous that the good trick which served the turn
Have justice rendered it, nor class one day
With friend Home's[1] stilts and tongs and medium-ware,—
What if the once redoubted Sphynx, I say,
(Because night draws on, and the sands increase,
And desert-whispers grow a prophecy)
Tell all to Corinth of her own accord,
Bright Corinth, not dull Thebes, for Laïs' sake,
Who finds me hardly grey, and likes my nose,
And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?
Good! It shall be! Revealment of myself!
But listen, for we must co-operate;
I don't drink tea: permit me the cigar!

First, how to make the matter plain, of course—
What was the law by which I lived. Let's see:
Ay, we must take one instant of my life
Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:
Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh!
Here's paper on the table, pen and ink:
Give me the soiled bit—not the pretty rose!
See! having sat an hour, I'm rested now,
Therefore want work: and spy no better work
For eye and hand and mind that guides them both,
During this instant, than to draw my pen
From blot One—thus—up, up to blot Two—thus—

[1] The notorious spiritualist and impostor.

Which I at last reach, thus, and here's my line
Five inches long and tolerably straight:
Better to draw than leave undrawn, I think,
Fitter to do than let alone, I hold,
Though better, fitter, by but one degree.
Therefore it was that, rather than sit still
Simply, my right-hand drew it while my left
Pulled smooth and pinched the moustache to a point.

Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse:
"So far, one possibly may understand
"Without recourse to witchcraft!" True, my dear.
Thus folks begin with Euclid,—finish, how?
Trying to square the circle!—at any rate,
Solving abstruser problems than this first
"How find the nearest way 'twixt point and point."
Deal but with moral mathematics so—
Master one merest moment's work of mine,
Even this practising with pen and ink,—
Demonstrate why I rather plied the quill
Than left the space a blank,—you gain a fact,
And God knows what a fact's worth! So proceed
By inference from just this moral fact
—I don't say, to that plaguy quadrature
"What the whole man meant, whom you wish you knew,"
But, what meant certain things he did of old,
Which puzzled Europe,—why, you'll find them plain,
This way, not otherwise: I guarantee,
Understand one, you comprehend the rest.
Rays from all round converge to any point:
Study the point then ere you track the rays!
The size o' the circle's nothing; subdivide
Earth, and earth's smallest grain of mustard-seed,
You count as many parts, small matching large,
If you can use the mind's eye: otherwise,
Material optics, being gross at best,
Prefer the large and leave our mind the small—
And pray how many folk have minds can see?
Certainly you—and somebody in Thrace
Whose name escapes me at the moment. You—
Lend me your mind then! Analyse with me
This instance of the line 'twixt blot and blot
I rather chose to draw than leave a blank,
Things else being equal. You are taught thereby
That 'tis my nature, when I am at ease,
Rather than idle out my life too long,
To want to do a thing—to put a thought,
Whether a great thought or a little one,
Into an act, as nearly as may be.
Make what is absolutely new—I can't,
Mar what is made already well enough—
I won't: but turn to best account the thing
That's half-made—that I can. Two blots, you saw
I knew how to extend into a line
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before—
Such little act sufficed, this time, such thought.

Now, we'll extend rays, widen out the verge,
Describe a larger circle; leave this first
Clod of an instance we began with, rise
To the complete world many clods effect.
Only continue patient while I throw,
Delver-like, spadeful after spadeful up,
Just as truths come, the subsoil of me, mould
Whence spring my moods: your object,—just to find,
Alike from handlift and from barrow-load,
What salts and silts may constitute the earth—
If it be proper stuff to blow man glass,
Or bake him pottery, bear him oaks or wheat—
What's born of me, in brief; which found, all's known.
If it were genius did the digging-job,
Logic would speedily sift its product smooth
And leave the crude truths bare for poetry;
But I'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.
What one spread fails to bring, another may.
In goes the shovel and out comes scoop—as here!

I live to please myself. I recognize
Power passing mine, immeasurable, God—
Above me, whom He made, as heaven beyond
Earth—to use figures which assist our sense.
I know that He is there as I am here,
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.
Why "there," not "here"? Because, when I say "there,"
I treat the feeling with distincter shape
That space exists between us: I,—not He,—
Live, think, do human work here—no machine,
His will moves, but a being by myself,
His, and not He who made me for a work,
Watches my working, judges its effect,
But does not interpose. He did so once,
And probably will again some time—not now,
Life being the minute of mankind, not God's,
In a certain sense, like time before and time
After man's earthly life, so far as man
Needs apprehend the matter. Am I clear?
Suppose I bid a courier take to-night
(. . . Once for all, let me talk as if I smoked
Yet in the Residenz, a personage:
I must still represent the thing I was,
Galvanically make dead muscle play,
Or how shall I illustrate muscle's use?)
I could then, last July, bid courier take
Message for me, post-haste, a thousand miles.
I bid him, since I have the right to bid,
And, my part done so far, his part begins;
He starts with due equipment, will and power,
Means he may use, misuse, not use at all,
At his discretion, at his peril too.
I leave him to himself: but, journey done,
I count the minutes, call for the result
In quickness and the courier quality,
Weigh its worth, and then punish or reward
According to proved service; not before.
Meantime, he sleeps through noontide, rides till dawn,
Sticks to the straight road, tries the crooked path,
Measures and manages resource, trusts, doubts
Advisers by the wayside, does his best
At his discretion, lags or launches forth,
(He knows and I know) at his peril too.
You see? Exactly thus men stand to God:
I with my courier, God with me. Just so
I have His bidding to perform; but mind
And body, all of me, though made and meant
For that sole service, must consult, concert
With my own self and nobody beside,
How to effect the same: God helps not else.
'Tis I who, with my stock of craft and strength,
Choose the directer cut across the hedge,
Or keep the foot-track that respects a crop.
Lie down and rest, rise up and run,—live spare,
Feed free,—all that's my business: but, arrive,
Deliver message, bring the answer back,
And make my bow, I must: then God will speak,
Praise me or haply blame as service proves.
To other men, to each and everyone,
Another law! what likelier? God, perchance,
Grants each new man, by some as new a mode,
Intercommunication with Himself,
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude;
By such a series of effects, gives each
Last His own imprint: old yet ever new
The process: 'tis the way of Deity.
How it succeeds, He knows: I only know
That varied modes of creatureship abound,
Implying just as varied intercourse
For each with the creator of them all.
Each has his own mind and no other's mode.
What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize!
No doubt, you, good young lady that you are,
Despite a natural naughtiness or two,
Turn eyes up like a Pradier Magdalen[1]
And see an outspread providential hand
Above the owl's-wing aigrette—guard and guide—
Visibly o'er your path, about your bed,
Through all your practisings with London-town.
It points, you go; it stays fixed, and you stop;

[1] In the Louvre. Pradier was a famous sculptor. His statue of Rousseau is at Geneva.

You quicken its procedure by a word
Spoken, a thought in silence, prayer and praise.
Well, I believe that such a hand may stoop,
And such appeals to it may stave off harm,
Pacify the grim guardian of this Square,
And stand you in good stead on quarter-day:
Quite possible in your case; not in mine.
"Ah, but I choose to make the difference,
Find the emancipation?" No, I hope!
If I deceive myself, take noon for night,
Please to become determinedly blind
To the true ordinance of human life,
Through mere presumption—that is my affair,
And truly a grave one; but as grave I think
Your affair, yours, the specially observed,—
Each favoured person that perceives his path
Pointed him, inch by inch, and looks above
For guidance, through the mazes of this world,
In what we call its meanest life-career
—Not how to manage Europe properly,
But how keep open shop, and yet pay rent,
Rear household, and make both ends meet, the same.
I say, such man is no less tasked than I
To duly take the path appointed him
By whatsoever sign he recognize.
Our insincerity on both our heads!
No matter what the object of a life,
Small work or large,—the making thrive a shop,
Or seeing that an empire take no harm,—
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.
You've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper—
Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince—
You know my work i' the rough; I ask you, then,
Do I appear subordinated less
To hand-impulsion, one prime push for all,
Than little lives of men, the multitude
That cried out, every quarter of an hour,
For fresh instructions, did or did not work,
And praised in the odd minutes?

Eh, my dear?
Such is the reason why I acquiesced
In doing what seemed best for me to do,
So as to please myself on the great scale,
Having regard to immortality
No less than life—did that which head and heart
Prescribed my hand, in measure with its means
Of doing—used my special stock of power—
Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone,
But every sort of helpful circumstance,
Some problematic and some nondescript:
All regulated by the single care
I' the last resort—that I made thoroughly serve
The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed
As resolutely at the proper point,
Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end:
Namely, that just the creature I was bound
To be, I should become, nor thwart at all
God's purpose in creation. I conceive
No other duty possible to man,—
Highest mind, lowest mind, no other law
By which to judge life failure or success:
What folk call being saved or cast away.

Such was my rule of life: I worked my best
Subject to ultimate judgment, God's not man's.
Well then, this settled,—take your tea, I beg,
And meditate the fact, 'twixt sip and sip,—
This settled—why I pleased myself, you saw,
By turning blot and blot into a line,
O' the little scale,—we'll try now (as your tongue
Tries the concluding sugar-drop) what's meant
To please me most o' the great scale. Why, just now,
With nothing else to do within my reach,
Did I prefer making two blots one line
To making yet another separate
Third blot, and leaving those I found unlinked?
It meant, I like to use the thing I find,
Rather than strive at unfound novelty:
I make the best of the old, nor try for new.
Such will to act, such choice of action's way,
Constitute—when at work on the great scale,
Driven to their farthest natural consequence
By all the help from all the means—my own
Particular faculty of serving God,

Instinct for putting power to exercise
Upon some wish and want o' the time, I prove
Possible to mankind as best I may.
This constitutes my mission,—grant the phrase,—
Namely, to rule men—men within my reach,
To order, influence and dispose them so
As render solid and stabilify
Mankind in particles, the light and loose,
For their good and my pleasure in the act.
Such good accomplished proves twice good to me—
Good for its own sake, as the just and right,
And, in the effecting also, good again
To me its agent, tasked as suits my taste.

Is this much easy to be understood
At first glance? Now begin the steady gaze!

My rank—(if I must tell you simple truth—
Telling were else not worth the whiff o' the weed
I lose for the tale's sake)—dear, my rank i' the world
Is hard to know and name precisely: err
I may, but scarcely over-estimate
My style and title. Do I class with men
Most useful to their fellows? Possibly,—
Therefore, in some sort, best; but, greatest mind
And rarest nature? Evidently no.
A conservator, call me, if you please,
Not a creator nor destroyer: one
Who keeps the world safe. I profess to trace
The broken circle of society,
Dim actual order, I can redescribe
Not only where some segment silver-true
Stays clear, but where the breaks of black commence
Baffling you all who want the eye to probe—
As I make out yon problematic thin
White paring of your thumb-nail outside there,
Above the plaster-monarch on his steed—
See an inch, name an ell, and prophesy
O' the rest that ought to follow, the round moon
Now hiding in the night of things: that round,
I labour to demonstrate moon enough
For the month's purpose,—that society,
Render efficient for the age's need:
Preserving you in either case the old,
Nor aiming at a new and greater thing,
A sun for moon, a future to be made
By first abolishing the present law:
No such proud task for me by any means!
History shows you men whose master-touch
Not so much modifies as makes anew:
Minds that transmute nor need restore at all.
A breath of God made manifest in flesh
Subjects the world to change, from time to time,
Alters the whole conditions of our race
Abruptly, not by unperceived degrees
Nor play of elements already there,
But quite new leaven, leavening the lump,
And liker, so, the natural process. See!
Where winter reigned for ages—by a turn
I' the time, some star-change, (ask geologists)
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter and disperse,
And there's an end of immobility,
Silence, and all that tinted pageant, base
To pinnacle, one flush from fairyland
Dead-asleep and deserted somewhere,—see!—
As a fresh sun, wave, spring and joy outburst.
Or else the earth it is, time starts from trance,
Her mountains tremble into fire, her plains
Heave blinded by confusion: what result?
New teeming growth, surprises of strange life
Impossible before, a world broke up
And re-made, order gained by law destroyed.
Not otherwise, in our society
Follow like portents, all as absolute
Regenerations: they have birth at rare
Uncertain unexpected intervals
O' the world, by ministry impossible
Before and after fulness of the days:
Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,
Law-giver, lyrist,—oh, we know the names!
Quite other these than I. Our time requires
No such strange potentate,—who else would dawn,—
No fresh force till the old have spent itself.
Such seems the natural œconomy.

To shoot a beam into the dark, assists:
To make that beam do fuller service, spread
And utilize such bounty to the height,
That assists also,—and that work is mine.
I recognize, contemplate, and approve
The general compact of society,
Not simply as I see effected good,
But good i' the germ, each chance that's possible
I' the plan traced so far: all results, in short,
For better or worse of the operation due
To those exceptional natures, unlike mine,
Who, helping, thwarting, conscious, unaware,
Did somehow manage to so far describe
This diagram left ready to my hand,
Waiting my turn of trial. I see success,
See failure, see what makes or mars throughout.
How shall I else but help complete this plan
Of which I know the purpose and approve,
By letting stay therein what seems to stand,
And adding good thereto of easier reach
To-day than yesterday?

So much, no more!
Whereon, "No more than that?"—inquire aggrieved
Half of my critics: "nothing new at all?
The old plan saved, instead of a sponged slate
And fresh-drawn figure?"—while, "So much as that?"
Object their fellows of the other faith:
"Leave uneffaced the crazy labyrinth
Of alteration and amendment, lines
Which every dabster felt in duty bound
To signalize his power of pen and ink
By adding to a plan once plain enough?
Why keep each fool's bequeathment, scratch and blur
Which overscrawl and underscore the piece—
Nay, strengthen them by touches of your own?"

Well, that's my mission, so I serve the world,
Figure as man o' the moment,—in default
Of somebody inspired to strike such change
Into society—from round to square,
The ellipsis to the rhomboid, how you please,
As suits the size and shape o' the world he finds.
But this I can,—and nobody my peer,—
Do the best with the least change possible:
Carry the incompleteness on, a stage,
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,
And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,
It will not prove the worst achievement, sure,
In the eyes at least of one man, one I look
Nowise to catch in critic company:
To-wit, the man inspired, the genius' self
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.
He, at least, finds his business simplified,
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time
We live in, and I work on, and transmit
To such successor: he will operate
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine.
Let all my critics, born to idleness
And impotency, get their good, and have
Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf—
Who find great good in this society,
Great gain, the purchase of great labour. Touch
The work I may and must, but—reverent
In every fall o' the finger-tip, no doubt.
Perhaps I find all good there's warrant for
I' the world as yet: nay, to the end of time,—
Since evil never means part company
With mankind, only shift side and change shape.
I find advance i' the main, and notably
The Present an improvement on the Past,
And promise for the Future—which shall prove
Only the Present with its rough made smooth,
Its indistinctness emphasized; I hope
No better, nothing newer for mankind,
But something equably smoothed everywhere,
Good, reconciled with hardly-quite-as-good,
Instead of good and bad each jostling each.
"And that's all?" Ay, and quite enough for me!
We have toiled so long to gain what gain I find
I' the Present,—let us keep it! We shall toil
So long before we gain—if gain God grant—
A Future with one touch of difference

I' the heart of things, and not their outside face,—
Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar
For Fourier, Comte, and all that ends in smoke!

This I see clearest probably of men
With power to act and influence, now alive:
Juster than they to the true state of things;
In consequence, more tolerant that, side
By side, shall co-exist and thrive alike
In the age, the various sorts of happiness
Moral, mark!—not material—moods o' the mind
Suited to man and man his opposite:
Say, minor modes of movement — hence to there,
Or thence to here, or simply round about—
So long as each toe spares its neighbour's kibe,
Nor spoils the major march and main advance.
The love of peace, care for the family,
Contentment with what's bad but might be worse—
Good movements these! and good, too, discontent,
So long as that spurs good, which might be best,
Into becoming better, anyhow:
Good—pride of country, putting hearth and home
I' the back-ground, out of undue prominence:
Good—yearning after change, strife, victory,
And triumph. Each shall have its orbit marked,
But no more,—none impede the other's path
In this wide world,—though each and all alike,
Save for me, fain would spread itself through space
And leave its fellow not an inch of way.
I rule and regulate the course, excite,
Restrain: because the whole machine should march
Impelled by those diversely-moving parts,
Each blind to aught beside its little bent.
Out of the turnings round and round inside,
Comes that straightforward world-advance, I want,
And none of them supposes God wants too
And gets through just their hindrance and my help.
I think that to have held the balance straight
For twenty years, say, weighing claim and claim,
And giving each its due, no less no more,
This was good service to humanity,
Right usage of my power in head and heart,
And reasonable piety beside.
Keep those three points in mind while judging me!
You stand, perhaps, for some one man, not men,—
Represent this or the other interest,
Nor mind the general welfare,—so, impugn
My practice and dispute my value: why?
You man of faith, I did not tread the world
Into a paste, and thereof make a smooth
Uniform mound whereon to plant your flag,
The lily-white, above the blood and brains!
Nor yet did I, you man of faithlessness,
So roll things to the level which you love,
That you could stand at ease there and survey
The universal Nothing undisgraced
By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire
I' the distance! Neither friend would I content,
Nor, as the world were simply meant for him,
Thrust out his fellow and mend God's mistake.
Why, you two fools,—my dear friends all the same,—
Is it some change o' the world and nothing else
Contents you? Should whatever was, not be?
How thanklessly you view things! There's the root
Of the evil, source of the entire mistake:
You see no worth i' the world, nature and life,
Unless we change what is to what may be,
Which means,—may be, i' the brain of one of you!
"Reject what is?"—all capabilities—
Nay, you may style them chances if you choose—
All chances, then, of happiness that lie
Open to anybody that is born,
Tumbles into this life and out again,—

All that may happen, good and evil too,
I' the space between, to each adventurer
Upon this 'sixty, Anno Domini:
A life to live—and such a life! a world
To learn, one's lifetime in,—and such a world!
How did the foolish ever pass for wise
By calling life a burden, man a fly
Or worm or what's most insignificant?
"O littleness of man!" deplores the bard;
And then, for fear the Powers should punish him,
"O grandeur of the visible universe
Our human littleness contrasts withal!
O sun, O moon, ye mountains and thou sea,
Thou emblem of immensity, thou this,
That, and the other,—what impertinence
In man to eat and drink and walk about
And have his little notions of his own,
The while some wave sheds foam upon the shore!"
First of all, 'tis a lie some three-times thick:
The bard,—this sort of speech being poetry,—
The bard puts mankind well outside himself
And then begins instructing them: "This way
I and my friend the sea conceive of you!
What would you give to think such thoughts as ours
Of you and the sea together?" Down they go
On the humbled knees of them: at once they draw
Distinction, recognize no mate of theirs
In one, despite his mock humility,
So plain a match for what he plays with. Next,
The turn of the great ocean-playfellow,
When the bard, leaving Bond Street very far
From ear-shot, cares not to ventriloquize,
But tells the sea its home-truths: "You, my match?
You, all this terror and immensity
And what not? Shall I tell you what you are?
Just fit to hitch into a stanza, so
Wake up and set in motion who's asleep
O' the other side of you in England, else
Unaware, as folk pace their Bond Street now,
Somebody here despises them so much!
Between us,—they are the ultimate! to them
And their perception go these lordly thoughts:
Since what were ocean—mane and tail, to boot—
Mused I not here, how make thoughts thinkable?
Start forth my stanza and astound the world!
Back, billows, to your insignificance!
Deep, you are done with!"

Learn, my gifted friend,
There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk
Accept—intelligence and sympathy.
You pant about unutterable power
I' the ocean, all you feel but cannot speak?
Why, that's the plainest speech about it all.
You did not feel what was not to be felt.
Well, then, all else but what man feels is nought—
The wash o' the liquor that o'erbrims the cup
Called man, and runs to waste adown his side,
Perhaps to feed a cataract,—who cares?
I'll tell you: all the more I know mankind,
The more I thank God, like my grandmother,
For making me a little lower than
The angels, honour-clothed and glory-crowned:
This is the honour,—that no thing I know,
Feel or conceive, but I can make my own
Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart:
This is the glory,—that in all conceived,
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind
Not mine but like mine,—for the double joy,—
Making all things for me and me for Him.
There's folly for you at this time of day!
So think it! and enjoy your ignorance
Of what—no matter for the worthy's name—
Wisdom set working in a noble heart,
When he, who was earth's best geometer
Up to that time of day, consigned his life
With its results into one matchless book,
The triumph of the human mind so far,
All in geometry man yet could do:
And then wrote on the dedication-page
In place of name the universe applauds,
"But, God, what a geometer art Thou!"
I suppose Heaven is, through Eternity,
The equalizing, ever and anon,
In momentary rapture, great with small,

Omniscience with intelligency, God
With man,—the thunder-glow from pole to pole
Abolishing, a blissful moment-space,
Great cloud alike and small cloud, in one fire—
As sure to ebb as sure again to flow
When the new receptivity deserves
The new completion. There's the Heaven for me.
And I say, therefore, to live out one's life
I' the world here, with the chance,—whether by pain
Or pleasure be the process, long or short
The time, august or mean the circumstance
To human eye,—of learning how set foot
Decidedly on some one path to Heaven,
Touch segment in the circle whence all lines
Lead to the centre equally, red lines
Or black lines, so they but produce themselves—
This, I do say,—and here my sermon ends,—
This makes it worth our while to tenderly
Handle a state of things which mend we might,
Mar we may, but which meanwhile helps so far.
Therefore my end is—save society!

"And that's all?" twangs the never-failing taunt
O' the foe—"No novelty, creativeness,
Mark of the master that renews the age?"
"Nay, all that?" rather will demur my judge
I look to hear some day, nor friend nor foe—
"Did you attain, then, to perceive that God
Knew what He undertook when He made things?"
Ay: that my task was to co-operate
Rather than play the rival, chop and change
The order whence comes all the good we know,
With this,—good's last expression to our sense,—
That there's a further good conceivable
Beyond the utmost earth can realize:
And, therefore, that to change the agency,
The evil whereby good is brought about—
Try to make good do good as evil does—
Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,
And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,
Insisted these too should be white forsooth!
Correct the evil, mitigate your best,
Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to gray
If gray may follow with no detriment
To the eventual perfect purity!
But as for hazarding the main result
By hoping to anticipate one half
In the intermediate process,—no, my friends!
This bad world, I experience and approve;
Your good world,—with no pity, courage, hope,
Fear, sorrow, joy,—devotedness, in short,
Which I account the ultimate of man,
Of which there's not one day nor hour but brings,
In flower or fruit, some sample of success,
Out of this same society I save—
None of it for me! That I might have none,
I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years.
Such was the task imposed me, such my end.

Now for the means thereto. Ah, confidence—
Keep we together or part company?
This is the critical minute! "Such my end?"
Certainly; how could it be otherwise?
Can there be question which was the right task—
To save or to destroy society?
Why, even prove that, by some miracle,
Destruction were the proper work to choose,
And that a torch best remedies what's wrong
I' the temple, whence the long procession wound
Of powers and beauties, earth's achievements all,
The human strength that strove and overthrew,—
The human love that, weak itself, crowned strength,—
The instinct crying "God is whence I came!"—
The reason laying down the law "And such
His will i' the world must be!"—the leap and shout
Of genius "For I hold His very thoughts,
The meaning of the mind of Him!"—nay, more,
The ingenuities, each active force

That turning in a circle on itself
Looks neither up nor down but keeps the spot,
Mere creature-like, and, for religion, works,
Works only and works ever, makes and shapes
And changes, still wrings more of good from less,
Still stamps some bad out, where was worst before,
So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,
Were it but house and land and wealth, to show
Here was a creature perfect in the kind—
Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,
What's the importance? he has done his work
For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's praise;—
I say, concede that same fane, whence deploys
Age after age, all this humanity,
Diverse but ever dear, out of the dark
Behind the altar into the broad day
By the portal—enter, and, concede there mocks
Each lover of free motion and much space
A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave,—
Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I?—
Which irk the movement and impede the march,—
Nay, possibly, bring flat upon his nose
At some odd break-neck angle, by some freak
Of old-world artistry, that personage
Who, could he but have kept his skirts from grief
And catching at the hooks and crooks about,
Had stepped out on the daylight of our time
Plainly the man of the age,—still, still, I bar
Excessive conflagration in the case.
"Shake the flame freely!" shout the multitude:
The architect approves I stuck my torch
Inside a good stout lantern, hung its light
Above the hooks and crooks, and ended so.
To save society was well: the means
Whereby to save it,—there begins the doubt
Permitted you, imperative on me;
Were mine the best means? Did I work aright
With powers appointed me?—since powers denied
Concern me nothing.

Well, my work reviewed
Fairly, leaves more hope than discouragement.
First, there's the deed done: what I found, I leave,—
What tottered, I kept stable: if it stand
One month, without sustainment, still thank me
The twenty years' sustainer! Now, observe,
Sustaining is no brilliant self-display
Like knocking down or even setting up:
Much bustle these necessitate; and still
To vulgar eye, the mightier of the myth
Is Hercules, who substitutes his own
For Atlas' shoulder and supports the globe
A whole day,—not the passive and obscure
Atlas who bore, ere Hercules was born,
And is to go on bearing that same load
When Hercules turns ash on Œta's top.
'Tis the transition-stage, the tug and strain,
That strike men: standing still is stupid-like.
My pressure was too constant on the whole
For any part's eruption into space
Mid sparkles, crackling, and much praise of me.
I saw that, in the ordinary life,
Many of the little make a mass of men
Important beyond greatness here and there;
As certainly as, in life exceptional,
When old things terminate and new commence,
A solitary great man's worth the world.
God takes the business into His own hands
At such time: who creates the novel flower
Contrives to guard and give it breathing-room:
I merely tend the corn-field, care for crop,
And weed no acre thin to let emerge
What prodigy may stifle there perchance,
—No, though my eye have noted where he lurks.
Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me—
The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths
That sought the daily bread and nothing more,
The hands that supplicated exercise,
Men that had wives, and women that had babes,
And all these making suit to only live!
Was I to turn aside from husbandry,

Leave hope of harvest for the corn, my care,
To play at horticulture, rear some rose
Or poppy into perfect leaf and bloom
When, mid the furrows, up was pleased to sprout
Some man, cause, system, special interest
I ought to study, stop the world meanwhile?
"But I am Liberty, Philanthropy,
Enlightenment, or Patriotism, the power
Whereby you are to stand or fall!" cries each:
"Mine and mine only be the flag you flaunt!"
And, when I venture to object "Meantime,
What of yon myriads with no flag at all—
My crop which, who flaunts flag must tread across?"
"Now, this it is to have a puny mind!"
Admire my mental prodigies: "down—down—
Ever at home o' the level and the low,
There bides he brooding! Could he look above,
With less of the owl and more of the eagle eye,
He'd see there's no way helps the little cause
Like the attainment of the great. Dare first
The chief emprize; dispel yon cloud between
The sun and us; nor fear that, though our heads
Find earlier warmth and comfort from his ray,
What lies about our feet, the multitude,
Will fail of benefaction presently.
Come now, let each of us awhile cry truce
To special interests, make common cause
Against the adversary—or perchance
Mere dullard to his own plain interest!
Which of us will you choose?—since needs must be
Some one o' the warring causes you incline
To hold, i' the main, has right and should prevail:
Why not adopt and give it prevalence?
Choose strict Faith or lax Incredulity,—
King, Caste and Cultus—or the Rights of Man,
Sovereignty of each Proudhon[1] o'er himself,
And all that follows in just consequence!
Go free the stranger from a foreign yoke;
Or stay, concentrate energy at home;
Succeed!—when he deserves, the stranger will.

[1] "*La Propriété, c'est le vol.*"

Comply with the Great Nation's impulse, print
By force of arms,—since reason pleads in vain,
And, mid the sweet compulsion, pity weeps,—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau on the universe!
Snub the Great Nation, cure the impulsive itch
With smartest fillip on a restless nose
Was ever launched by thumb and finger! Bid
Hohenstiel-Schwangau first repeal the tax
On pig-tails and pomatum, and then mind
Abstruser matters for next century!
Is your choice made? Why then, act up to choice!
Leave the illogical touch now here now there
I' the way of work, the tantalizing help
First to this, then the other opposite:
The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,
Sure ague of the mind and nothing more,
Disease of the perception or the will,
That fain would hide in a fine name! Your choice,
Speak it out and condemn yourself thereby!"

Well, Leicester-square is not the Residenz:
Instead of shrugging shoulder, turning friend
The deaf ear, with a wink to the police—
I'll answer—by a question, wisdom's mode.
How many years, o' the average, do men
Live in this world? Some score, say computists.
Quintuple me that term and give mankind
The likely hundred, and with all my heart
I'll take your task upon me, work your way,
Concentrate energy on some one cause:
Since, counseller, I also have my cause,
My flag, my faith in its effect, my hope
In its eventual triumph for the good
O' the world. And once upon a time, when I
Was like all you, mere voice and nothing more,
Myself took wings, soared sunward, and thence sang
"Look where I live i' the loft, come up to me,
Groundlings, nor grovel longer! gain this height,
And prove you breathe here better than below!
Why, what emancipation far and wide

Will follow in a trice! They too can soar,
Each tenant of the earth's circumference
Claiming to elevate humanity,
They also must attain such altitude,
Live in the luminous circle that surrounds
The planet, not the leaden orb itself.
Press out, each point, from surface to yon verge
Which one has gained and guaranteed your realm!"
Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
For ever! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there
Imparting exultation to the hills!
Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk
And waft my words above the grassy sea
Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome,—
Hear ye not still—"Be Italy again"?
And ye, what strikes the panic to your heart?
Decrepit council-chambers, — where some lamp
Drives the unbroken black three paces off
From where the greybeards huddle in debate,
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
And what they think is fear, and what suspends
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch
Time disengages from the painted wall
Where Rafael moulderingly bids adieu,
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry
Which a queen's finger traced of old, to dust;
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,
Of who once felt upon his head a hand
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot.
"Light in Rome, Law in Rome, and Liberty
O' the soul in Rome—the free Church, the free State!
Stamp out the nature that's best typified
By its embodiment in Peter's Dome,
The scorpion-body with the greedy pair
Of outstretched nippers, either colonnade
Agape for the advance of heads and hearts!"
There's one cause for you! one and only one,
For I am vocal through the universe,
I' the workshop, manufactory, exchange
And market-place, sea-port and custom-house
O' the frontier: listen if the echoes die—
"Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear,
And print and read! The universal vote!
Its rights for labour!" This, with much beside,
I spoke when I was voice and nothing more,
But altogether such an one as you
My censors. "Voice, and nothing more, indeed!"
Re-echoes round me: "that's the censure, there's
Involved the ruin of you soon or late!
Voice,—when its promise beat the empty air:
And nothing more,—when solid earth's your stage,
And we desiderate performance, deed
For word, the realizing all you dreamed
In the old days: now, for deed, we find at door
O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard
O' the greybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,
Who challenge Judas,—that's endearment's style,—
To stop their mouths or let escape grimace,
While they keep cursing Italy and him.
The power to speak, hear, print and read is ours?
Ay, we learn where and how, when clapped inside
A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne!
The universal vote we have: its urn,
We also have where votes drop, fingered-o'er
By the universal Prefect. Say, Trade's free
And Toil turned master out o' the slave it was:
What then? These feed man's stomach, but his soul
Craves finer fare, nor lives by bread alone,

As somebody says somewhere. Hence you stand
Proved and recorded either false or weak,
Faulty in promise or performance: which?"
Neither, I hope. Once pedestalled on earth,
To act not speak, I found earth was not air.
I saw that multitude of mine, and not
The nakedness and nullity of air
Fit only for a voice to float in free.
Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone,
Such mouths that wanted bread and nothing else,
Such hands that supplicated handiwork,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes,
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die!
Did I believe one whit less in belief,
Take truth for falsehood, wish the voice revoked
That told the truth to heaven for earth to hear?
No, this should be, and shall; but when and how?
At what expense to these who average
Your twenty years of life, my computists?
"Not bread alone" but bread before all else
For these: the bodily want serve first, said I;
If earth-space and the life-time help not here,
Where is the good of body having been?
But, helping body, if we somewhat baulk
The soul of finer fare, such food's to find
Elsewhere and afterward—all indicates,
Even this self-same fact that soul can starve
Yet body still exist its twenty years:
While, stint the body, there's an end at once
O' the revel in the fancy that Rome's free,
And superstition's fettered, and one prints
Whate'er one pleases and who pleases reads
The same, and speaks out and is spoken to,
And divers hundred thousand fools may vote
A vote untampered with by one wise man,
And so elect Barabbas deputy
In lieu of his concurrent. I who trace
The purpose written on the face of things,
For my behoof and guidance—(whoso needs
No such sustainment, sees beneath my signs,
Proves, what I take for writing, penmanship,
Scribble and flourish with no sense for me
O' the sort I solemnly go spelling out,—
Let him! there's certain work of mine to show
Alongside his work: which gives warranty
Of shrewder vision in the workman—judge!)
I who trace Providence without a break
I' the plan of things, drop plumb on this plain print
Of an intention with a view to good,
That man is made in sympathy with man
At outset of existence, so to speak;
But in dissociation, more and more,
Man from his fellow, as their lives advance
In culture; still humanity, that's born
A mass, keeps flying off, fining away
Ever into a multitude of points,
And ends in isolation, each from each:
Peerless above i' the sky, the pinnacle,—
Absolute contact, fusion, all below
At the base of being. How comes this about?
This stamp of God characterizing man
And nothing else but man in the universe—
That, while he feels with man (to use man's speech)
I' the little things of life, its fleshly wants
Of food and rest and health and happiness,
Its simplest spirit-motions, loves and hates,
Hopes, fears, soul-cravings on the ignoblest scale,
O' the fellow-creature,—owns the bond at base,—
He tends to freedom and divergency
In the upward progress, plays the pinnacle
When life's at greatest (grant again the phrase!
Because there's neither great nor small in life).
"Consult thou for thy kind that have the eyes
To see, the mouths to eat, the hands to work,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes!"
Prompts Nature. "Care thou for thyself alone
I' the conduct of the mind God made thee with!
Think, as if man had never thought before!
Act, as if all creation hung attent
On the acting of such faculty as thine,
To take prime pattern from thy masterpiece!"
Nature prompts also: neither law obeyed
To the uttermost by any heart and soul
We know or have in record: both of them
Acknowledged blindly by whatever man
We ever knew or heard of in this world.
"Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact

Made plain as pikestaff?" modern Science asks.
"That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump
Once on a time; he kept an after course
Through fish and insect, reptile, bird and beast,
Till he attained to be an ape at last
Or last but one. And if this doctrine shock
In aught the natural pride" . . . Friend, banish fear,
The natural humility replies!
Do you suppose, even I, poor potentate,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who once ruled the roast,—
I was born able at all points to ply
My tools? or did I have to learn my trade,
Practise as exile ere perform as prince?
The world knows something of my ups and downs:
But grant me time, give me the management
And manufacture of a model me,
Me fifty-fold, a prince without a flaw,—
Why, there's no social grade, the sordidest,
My embryo potentate should blink and scape.
King, all the better he was cobbler once,
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes
Life to who sweeps the doorway. But life's hard,
Occasion rare; you cut probation short,
And, being half-instructed, on the stage
You shuffle through your part as best you can,
And bless your stars, as I do. God takes time.
I like the thought He should have lodged me once
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,
The mansion and the palace; made me learn
The feel o' the first, before I found myself
Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate;
From first to last of lodging, I was I,
And not at all the place that harboured me.
Do I refuse to follow farther yet
I' the backwardness, repine if tree and flower,
Mountain or streamlet were my dwelling-place
Before I gained enlargement, grew mollusc?
As well account that way for many a thrill
Of kinship, I confess to, with the powers
Called Nature: animate, inanimate,
In parts or in the whole, there's something there
Man-like that somehow meets the man in me.
My pulse goes altogether with the heart
O' the Persian, that old Xerxes, when he stayed
His march to conquest of the world, a day
I' the desert, for the sake of one superb
Plane-tree which queened it there in solitude:
Giving her neck its necklace, and each arm
Its armlet, suiting soft waist, snowy side,
With cincture and apparel. Yes, I lodged
In those successive tenements; perchance
Taste yet the straitness of them while I stretch
Limb and enjoy new liberty the more.
And some abodes are lost or ruinous;
Some, patched-up and pieced-out, and so transformed
They still accommodate the traveller
His day of lifetime. O you count the links,
Descry no bar of the unbroken man?
Yes,—and who welds a lump of ore, suppose
He likes to make a chain and not a bar,
And reach by link on link, link small, link large,
Out to the due length—why, there's forethought still
Outside o' the series, forging at one end,
While at the other there's—no matter what
The kind of critical intelligence
Believing that last link had last but one
For parent, and no link was, first of all,
Fitted to anvil, hammered into shape.
Else, I accept the doctrine, and deduce
This duty, that I recognize mankind,
In all its height and depth and length and breadth.
Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large:
I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,
Mankind, must help the least wants first. My friend,
That is, my foe, without such power and will,
May plausibly concentrate all he wields,
And do his best at helping some large want,
Exceptionally noble cause, that's seen
Subordinate enough from where I stand.
As he helps, I helped once, when like himself,
Unable to help better, work more wide;

And so would work with heart and hand to-day,
Did only computists confess a fault,
And multiply the single score by five,
Five only, give man's life its hundred years.
Change life, in me shall follow change to match!
Time were then, to work here, there, everywhere,
By turns and try experiment at ease!
Full time to mend as well as mar: why wait
The slow and sober uprise all around
O' the building? Let us run up, right to roof,
Some sudden marvel, piece of perfectness,
And testify what we intend the whole!
Is the world losing patience? "Wait!" say we:
"There's time: no generation needs to die
Unsolaced; you've a century in store!"
But, no: I sadly let the voices wing
Their way i' the upper vacancy, nor test
Truth on this solid as I promised once.
Well, and what is there to be sad about?
The world's the world, life's life, and nothing else.
'Tis part of life, a property to prize,
That those o' the higher sort engaged i' the world,
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty: find
Enough success in fancy turning fact,
To keep the sanguine kind in countenance
And justify the hope that busies them:
Failure enough,—to who can follow change
Beyond their vision, see new good prove ill
I' the consequence, see blacks and whites of life
Shift square indeed, but leave the chequered face
Unchanged i' the main,—failure enough for such,
To bid ambition keep the whole from change,
As their best service. I hope nought beside.
No, my brave thinkers, whom I recognize,
Gladly, myself the first, as, in a sense,
All that our world's worth, flower and fruit of man!
Such minds myself award supremacy
Over the common insignificance,
When only Mind's in question,—Body bows
To quite another government, you know.
Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air!
Hans Slouch,—his own, and children's mouths to feed
I' the hovel on the ground,—wants meat, nor chews
"The Critique of Pure Reason" in exchange.
But, now,—suppose I could allow your claims
And quite change life to please you,—would it please?
Would life comport with change and still be life?
Ask, now, a doctor for a remedy:
There's his prescription. Bid him point you out
Which of the five or six ingredients saves
The sick man. "Such the efficacity?
Then why not dare and do things in one dose
Simple and pure, all virtue, no alloy
Of the idle drop and powder?" What's his word?
The efficacity, neat, were neutralized:
It wants dispersing and retarding,—nay
Is put upon its mettle, plays its part
Precisely through such hindrance everywhere,
Finds some mysterious give and take i' the case,
Some gain by opposition, he foregoes
Should he unfetter the medicament.
So with this thought of yours that fain would work
Free in the world: it wants just what it finds—
The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,
Envy and malice and uncharitableness
That bar your passage, break the flow of you
Down from those happy heights where many a cloud
Combined to give you birth and bid you be
The royalest of rivers: on you glide
Silverly till you reach the summit-edge,
Then over, on to all that ignorance,
Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs and blocks,
Posted to fret you into foam and noise.
What of it? Up you mount in minute mist,
And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,
A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry
Outsparkling the insipid firmament

Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.
Do not mistake me! You, too, have your rights!
Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head
Because he cannot understand Kant's book:
And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self
Because Kant understands some books too well.
But, justice seen to on this little point,
Answer me, is it manly, is it sage
To stop and struggle with arrangements here
It took so many lives, so much of toil,
To tinker up into efficiency?
Can't you contrive to operate at once,—
Since time is short and art is long,—to show
Your quality i' the world, whate'er you boast,
Without this fractious call on folks to crush
The world together just to set you free,
Admire the capers you will cut perchance,
Nor mind the mischief to your neighbours?

"Age!
Age and experience bring discouragement,"
You taunt me: I maintain the opposite.
Am I discouraged who,—perceiving health,
Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,
Are uncombinable with flesh and blood,—
Resolve to let my body live its best,
And leave my soul what better yet may be
Or not be, in this life or afterward?
—In either fortune, wiser than who waits
Till magic art procure a miracle.
In virtue of my very confidence
Mankind ought to outgrow its babyhood,
I prescribe rocking, deprecate rough hands,
While thus the cradle holds it past mistake.
Indeed, my task's the harder—equable
Sustainment everywhere, all strain, no push—
Whereby friends credit me with indolence,
Apathy, hesitation. "Stand stock-still
If able to move briskly? 'All a-strain'—
So must we compliment your passiveness?
Sound asleep, rather!"

Just the judgment passed
Upon a statue, luckless like myself,
I saw at Rome once! 'Twas some artist's whim
To cover all the accessories close
I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön
With neither sons nor serpents to denote
The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
Was called to try the question, criticize
Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,
Nay, eyeballs, starting from the socket. One—
I give him leave to write my history—
Only one said "I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see."
All the rest made their minds up. "'Tis a yawn
Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:
The statue's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"

There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience both
And arbitress, you have one half your wish,
At least: you know the thing I tried to do!
All, so far, to my praise and glory—all
Told as befits the self-apologist,—
Who ever promises a candid sweep
And clearance of those errors miscalled crimes
None knows more, none laments so much as he,
And ever rises from confession, proved
A god whose fault was—trying to be man.
Just so, fair judge,—if I read smile aright—
I condescend to figure in your eyes
As biggest heart and best of Europe's friends,
And hence my failure. God will estimate
Success one day; and, in the mean time—you!

I dare say there's some fancy of the sort
Frolicking round this final puff I send
To die up yonder in the ceiling-rose,—
Some consolation-stakes, we losers win!
A plague of the return to "I—I—I
Did this, meant that, hoped, feared the other thing!"
Autobiography, adieu! The rest
Shall make amends, be pure blame, history
And falsehood: not the ineffective truth,
But Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise.
Hear what I never was, but might have been

I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!
Here lie the dozen volumes of my life:
(Did I say "lie"? the pregnant word will serve).
Cut on to the concluding chapter, though!
Because the little hours begin to strike.
Hurry Thiers-Hugo to the labour's end!

Something like this the unwritten chapter reads.

Exemplify the situation thus!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, being, no dispute,
Absolute mistress, chose the Assembly, first,
To serve her: chose this man, its President
Afterward, to serve also,—specially
To see that folk did service one and all.
And now the proper term of years was out
When the Head-servant must vacate his place,
And nothing lay so patent to the world
As that his fellow-servants one and all
Were—mildly to make mention—knaves or fools,
Each of them with his promise flourished full
I' the face of you by word and impudence,
Or filtered slyly out by nod and wink
And nudge upon your sympathetic rib—
That not one minute more did knave or fool
Mean to keep faith and serve as he had sworn
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, once her Head away.
Why should such swear except to get the chance,
When time should ripen and confusion bloom,
Of putting Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
To the true use of human property—
Restoring souls and bodies, this to Pope,
And that to King, that other to his planned
Perfection of a Share-and-share-alike,
That other still, to Empire absolute
In shape of the Head-servant's very self
Transformed to Master whole and sole? each scheme
Discussible, concede one circumstance—
That each scheme's parent were, beside himself,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, not her serving-man
Sworn to do service in the way she chose
Rather than his way: way superlative,
Only,—by some infatuation,—his
And his and his and everyone's but hers
Who stuck to just the Assembly and the Head.
I make no doubt the Head, too, had his dream
Of doing sudden duty swift and sure
On all that heap of untrustworthiness—
Catching each vaunter of the villany
He meant to perpetrate when time was ripe,
Once the Head-servant fairly out of doors,—
And, caging here a knave and there a fool,
Cry "Mistress of your servants, these and me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! I, their trusty Head,
Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here
That's stopped, extinguished by my vigilance.
Your property is safe again: but mark!
Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust
Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge awhile!
I know your business better than yourself:
Let me alone about it! Some fine day,
Once we are rid of the embarrassment,
You shall look up and see your longing crowned!"
Such fancy might have tempted him be false,
But this man chose truth and was wiser so.
He recognized that for great minds i' the world
There is no trial like the appropriate one
Of leaving little minds their liberty
Of littleness to blunder on through life,
Now, aiming at right ends by foolish means,
Now, at absurd achievement through the aid
Of good and wise endeavour—to acquiesce
In folly's life-long privilege, though with power
To do the little minds the good they need,
Despite themselves, by just abolishing
Their right to play the part and fill the place
I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike
Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.
Could the orb sweep those puny particles
It just half-lights at distance, hardly leads

I' the leash—sweep out each speck of them
from space
They anticize in with their days and nights
And whirlings round and dancings off, for-
sooth,
And all that fruitless individual life
One cannot lend a beam to but they spoil—
Sweep them into itself and so, one star,
Preponderate henceforth i' the heritage
Of heaven! No! in less senatorial phrase,
The man endured to help, not save outright
The multitude by substituting him
For them, his knowledge, will and way, for
God's:
Nor change the world, such as it is, and was
And will be, for some other, suiting all
Except the purpose of the maker. No!
He saw that weakness, wickedness will be,
And therefore should be: that the perfect man
As we account perfection—at most pure
O' the special gold, whate'er the form it take,
Head-work or heart-work, fined and thrice-
refined
I' the crucible of life, whereto the powers
Of the refiner, one and all, are flung
To feed the flame, he saw that e'en the block
Such perfect man holds out triumphant, breaks
Into some poisonous ore, gold's opposite,
At the very purest, so compensating
Man's Adversary—what if we believe?—
For earlier stern exclusion of his stuff.
See the sage, with the hunger for the truth,
And see his system that's all true, except
The one weak place that's stanchioned by a
lie!
The moralist who walks with head erect
I' the crystal clarity of air so long,
Until a stumble, and the man's one mire!
Philanthropy undoes the social knot
With axe-edge, makes love room 'twixt head
and trunk:
Religion—but, enough, the thing's too clear!
Well, if these sparks break out i' the greenest
tree,
Our topmost of performance, yours and mine,
What will be done i' the dry ineptitude
Of ordinary mankind, bark and bole,
All seems ashamed of but their mother-earth?
Therefore throughout Head's term of servitude
He did the appointed service, and forbore
Extraneous action that were duty else,
Done by some other servant, idle now
Or mischievous: no matter, each his own—
Own task, and, in the end, own praise or
blame!
He suffered them strut, prate and brag their
best,
Squabble at odds on every point save one,
And there shake hands,—agree to trifle time,
Obstruct advance with, each, his cricket-cry
"Wait till the Head be off the shoulders here!
Then comes my King, my Pope, my Autocrat,
My Socialist Republic to her own—
To-wit, that property of only me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau who conceits herself
Free, forsooth, and expects I keep her so!"
—Nay, suffered when, perceiving with dismay
Head's silence paid no tribute to their noise,
They turned on him. "Dumb menace in
that mouth,
Malice in that unstridulosity!
He cannot but intend some stroke of state
Shall signalize his passage into peace
Out of the creaking,—hinder transference
O' the Hohenstielers-Schwangauese to king,
Pope, autocrat, or socialist republic! That's
Exact the cause his lips unlocked would cry!
Therefore be stirring: brave, beard, bully
him!
Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,
The electoral body short at once! who did,
May do again, and undo us beside.
Wrest from his hands the sword for self-
defence,
The right to parry any thrust in play
We peradventure please to meditate!"
And so forth; creak, creak, creak: and ne'er
a line
His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last
O' the long degraded and insulting day,
Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.
Then he addressed himself to speak indeed
To the fools, not knaves: they saw him walk
straight down
Each step of the eminence, as he first engaged,
And stand at last o' the level,—all he swore.

"People, and not the people's varletry,
This is the task you set myself and these!
Thus I performed my part of it, and thus
They thwarted me throughout, here, here, and here:
Study each instance! yours the loss, not mine.
What they intend now is demonstrable
As plainly: here's such man, and here's such mode
Of making you some other than the thing
You, wisely or unwisely, choose to be,
And only set him up to keep you so.
Do you approve this? Yours the loss, not mine.
Do you condemn it? There's a remedy.
Take me—who know your mind, and mean your good,
With clearer brain and stouter arm than they,
Or you, or haply anybody else—
And make me master for the moment! Choose
What time, what power you trust me with: I too
Will choose as frankly ere I trust myself
With time and power: they must be adequate
To the end and aim, since mine the loss, with yours,
If means be wanting; once their worth approved,
Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate—
Ponder it well!—to the extremest stretch
O' the power you trust me: if with unsuccess,
God wills it, and there's nobody to blame."

Whereon the people answered with a shout
"The trusty one! no tricksters any more!"
How could they other? He was in his place.

What followed? Just what he foresaw, what proved
The soundness of both judgments,—his, o' the knaves
And fools, each trickster with his dupe,—and theirs,
The people's, in what head and arm could help.
There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,
Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!
Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb
On each perturber of the public peace,
No matter whose the wagging head it broke—
From bald-pate craft and greed and impudence
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey
For glory and a little gain beside,
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age,—
To florid head-top, foamy patriotism
And tribunitial daring, breast laid bare
Thro' confidence in rectitude, with hand
On private pistol in the pocket: these
And all the dupes of these, who lent themselves
As dust and feather do, to help offence
O' the wind that whirls them at you, then subsides
In safety somewhere, leaving filth afloat,
Annoyance you may brush from eyes and beard,—
These he stopped: bade the wind's spite howl or whine
Its worst outside the building, wind conceives
Meant to be pulled together and become
Its natural playground so. What foolishness
Of dust or feather proved importunate
And fell 'twixt thumb and finger, found them gripe
To detriment of bulk and buoyancy.
Then followed silence and submission. Next,
The inevitable comment came on work
And work's cost: he was censured as profuse
Of human life and liberty: too swift
And thorough his procedure, who had lagged
At the outset, lost the opportunity
Through timid scruples as to right and wrong.
"There's no such certain mark of a small mind"
(So did Sagacity explain the fault)
"As when it needs must square away and sink
To its own small dimensions, private scale
Of right and wrong,—humanity i' the large,
The right and wrong of the universe, forsooth!
This man addressed himself to guard and guide
Hohenstiel-Schwangau. When the case demands

He frustrate villany in the egg, unhatched,
With easy stamp and minimum of pang
E'en to the punished reptile, 'There's my oath
Restrains my foot,' objects our guide and guard,
'I must leave guardianship and guidance now:
Rather than stretch one handbreadth of the law,
I am bound to see it break from end to end.
First show me death i' the body politic:
Then prescribe pill and potion, what may please
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! all is for her sake:
'Twas she ordained my service should be so.
What if the event demonstrate her unwise,
If she unwill the thing she willed before?
I hold to the letter and obey the bond
And leave her to perdition loyally.'
Whence followed thrice the expenditure we blame
Of human life and liberty: for want
O' the by-blow, came deliberate butcher's-work!"
"Elsewhere go carry your complaint!" bade he.
"Least, largest, there's one law for all the minds,
Here or above: be true at any price!
'Tis just o' the great scale, that such happy stroke
Of falsehood would be found a failure. Truth
Still stands unshaken at her base by me,
Reigns paramount i' the world, for the large good
O' the long late generations,—I and you
Forgotten like this buried foolishness!
Not so the good I rooted in its grave."

This is why he refused to break his oath,
Rather appealed to the people, gained the power
To act as he thought best, then used it, once
For all, no matter what the consequence
To knaves and fools. As thus began his sway,
So, through its twenty years, one rule of right
Sufficed him: govern for the many first,
The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes:
Bid the few, better favoured in the brain,
Be patient nor presume on privilege,
Help him or else be quiet,—never crave
That he help them,—increase, forsooth, the gulf
Yawning so terribly 'twixt mind and mind
I' the world here, which his purpose was to block
At bottom, were it by an inch, and bridge,
If by a filament, no more, at top.
Equalize things a little! And the way
He took to work that purpose out, was plain
Enough to intellect and honesty
And—superstition, style it if you please,
So long as you allow there was no lack
O' the quality imperative in man—
Reverence. You see deeper? thus saw he,
And by the light he saw, must walk: how else
Was he to do his part? a man's, with might
And main, and not a faintest touch of fear,
Sure he was in the hand of God who comes
Before and after, with a work to do
Which no man helps nor hinders. Thus the man,—
So timid when the business was to touch
The uncertain order of humanity,
Imperil, for a problematic cure
Of grievance on the surface, any good
I' the deep of things, dim yet discernible—
This same man, so irresolute before,
Show him a true excrescence to cut sheer,
A devil's-graft on God's foundation-stock,
Then—no complaint of indecision more!
He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,
Deaf to who cried that earth would tumble in
At its four corners if he touched a twig.
Witness that lie of lies, arch-infamy,
When the Republic, with her life involved
In just this law—"Each people rules itself
Its own way, not as any stranger please"—
Turned, and for first proof she was living, bade
Hohenstiel-Schwangau fasten on the throat
Of the first neighbour that claimed benefit
O' the law herself established: "Hohenstiel

For Hohenstielers! Rome, by parity
Of reasoning, for Romans? That's a jest
Wants proper treatment,—lancet-puncture suits
The proud flesh: Rome ape Hohenstiel forsooth!"
And so the siege and slaughter and success
Whereof we nothing doubt that Hohenstiel
Will have to pay the price, in God's good time
Which does not always fall on Saturday
When the world looks for wages. Anyhow,
He found this infamy triumphant. Well:
Sagacity suggested, make this speech!
"The work was none of mine: suppose wrong wait,
Stand over for redressing? Mine for me,
My predecessors' work on their own head!
Meantime there's plain advantage, should we leave
Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled
Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!
Her foes consent to even seem our friends
So long, no longer. Then, there's glory got
By boldness and bravado to the world:
The disconcerted world must grin and bear
The old saucy writing, 'Grunt thereat who may,
So shall things be, for such my pleasure is—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's.' How that reads in Rome
I' the Capitol where Brennus broke his pate,
And lends a flourish to our journalists!"
Only, it was nor read nor flourished of,
Since, not a moment did such glory stay
Excision of the canker! Out it came,
Root and branch, with much roaring, and some blood,
And plentiful abuse of him from friend
And foe. Who cared? Not Nature who assuaged
The pain and set the patient on his legs
Promptly: the better! had it been the worse,
'Tis Nature you must try conclusions with,
Not he, since nursing canker kills the sick
For certain, while to cut may cure, at least.
"Ah," groaned a second time Sagacity,
"Again the little mind, precipitate,
Rash, rude, when even in the right, as here!
The great mind knows the power of gentleness,
Only tries force because persuasion fails.
Had this man, by prelusive trumpet-blast,
Signified 'Truth and Justice mean to come,
Nay, fast approach your threshold! Ere they knock,
See that the house be set in order, swept
And garnished, windows shut, and doors thrown wide!
The free State comes to visit the free Church:
Receive her! or . . . or . . . never mind what else!'
Thus moral suasion heralding brute force,
How had he seen the old abuses die,
And new life kindle here, there, everywhere,
Roused simply by that mild yet potent spell—
Beyond or beat of drum or stroke of sword—
Public opinion!"

"How, indeed?" he asked,
"When all to see, after some twenty years,
Were your own fool-face waiting for the sight,
Faced by as wide a grin from ear to ear
O' the knaves who, while the fools were waiting, worked—
Broke yet another generation's heart—
Twenty years' respite helping! Teach your nurse
'Compliance with, before you suck, the teat!'
Find what that means, and meanwhile hold your tongue!"

Whereof the war came which he knew must be.

Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race
He ruled o'er, that, i' the old day, when was need
They fought for their own liberty and life,
Well did they fight, none better: whence, such love
Of fighting somehow still for fighting's sake
Against no matter whose the liberty
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow
And clap the wing, while justice sheathed her claw,—
That what had been the glory of the world

When thereby came the world's good, grew its plague
Now that the champion-armour, donned to dare
The dragon once, was clattered up and down
Highway and by-path of the world at peace,
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake
O' the shine and rattle that apprized the fields
Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet,
And would be, till the weary world suppressed
Her peccant humours out of fashion now.
Accordingly the world spoke plain at last,
Promised to punish who next played with fire.

So, at his advent, such discomfiture
Taking its true shape of beneficence,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, half-sad and part-wise,
Sat: if with wistful eye reverting oft
To each pet weapon, rusty on its peg,
Yet, with a sigh of satisfaction too
That, peacefulness become the law, herself
Got the due share of godsends in its train,
Cried shame and took advantage quietly.
Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into
Blood, bones and marrow, that, from worst to best,
All,—clearest brains and soundest hearts save here,—
All had this lie acceptable for law
Plain as the sun at noonday—"War is best,
Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate
As needful preparation for new war:
War may be for whatever end we will—
Peace only as the proper help thereto.
Such is the law of right and wrong for us
Hohenstiel-Schwangau: for the other world,
As naturally, quite another law.
Are we content? The world is satisfied.
Discontent? Then the world must give us leave
To strike right, left, and exercise our arm
Torpid of late through overmuch repose,
And show its strength is still superlative
At somebody's expense in life or limb:
Which done,—let peace succeed and last a year!"
Such devil's-doctrine so was judged God's law,
We say, when this man stepped upon the stage,
That it had seemed a venial fault at most
Had he once more obeyed Sagacity.
"You come i' the happy interval of peace,
The favourable weariness from war:
Prolong it! artfully, as if intent
On ending peace as soon as possible.
Quietly so increase the sweets of ease
And safety, so employ the multitude,
Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,
So stuff and stop up wagging jaws with bread,
That selfishness shall surreptitiously
Do wisdom's office, whisper in the ear
Of Hohenstiel-Schwangau, there's a pleasant feel
In being gently forced down, pinioned fast
To the easy arm-chair by the pleading arms
O' the world beseeching her to there abide
Content with all the harm done hitherto,
And let herself be petted in return,
Free to re-wage, in speech and prose and verse,
The old unjust wars, nay—in verse and prose
And speech,—to vaunt new victories shall prove
A plague o' the future,—so that words suffice
For present comfort, and no deeds denote
That—tired of illimitable line on line
Of boulevard-building, tired o' the theatre
With the tuneful thousand in their thrones above,
For glory of the male intelligence,
And Nakedness in her due niche below,
For illustration of the female use—
That she, 'twixt yawn and sigh, prepares to slip
Out of the arm-chair, wants fresh blood again
From over the boundary, to colour-up
The sheeny sameness, keep the world aware
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's arm needs exercise
Despite the petting of the universe!
Come, you're a city-builder: what's the way
Wisdom takes when time needs that she entice
Some fierce tribe, castled on the mountain-peak,
Into the quiet and amenity
O' the meadow-land below? By crying 'Done

With fight now, down with fortress?' Rather
—'Dare
On, dare ever, not a stone displace!'
Cries Wisdom: 'Cradle of our ancestors,
Be bulwark, give our children safety still!
Who of our children please may stoop and taste
O' the valley-fatness, unafraid,—for why?
At first alarm they have thy mother-ribs
To run upon for refuge: foes forget
Scarcely that Terror on her vantage-coign,
Couchant supreme among the powers of air,
Watches—prepared to pounce—the country wide!
Meanwhile the encouraged valley holds its own,
From the first hut's adventure in descent,
Half home, half hiding place,—to dome and spire
Befitting the assured metropolis:
Nor means offence to the fort which caps the crag,
All undismantled of a turret-stone,
And bears the banner-pole that creaks at times
Embarrassed by the old emblazonment,
When festal days are to commemorate:
Otherwise left untenanted, no doubt,
Since, never fear, our myriads from below
Would rush, if needs were, man the walls again,
Renew the exploits of the earlier time
At moment's notice! But till notice sound,
Inhabit we in ease and opulence!'
And so, till one day thus a notice sounds,
Not trumpeted, but in a whisper-gust
Fitfully playing through mute city streets
At midnight weary of day's feast and game—
'Friends, your famed fort's a ruin past repair!
Its use is—to proclaim it had a use
Obsolete long since. Climb and study there
How to paint barbican and battlement
I' the scenes of our new theatre! We fight
Now—by forbidding neighbours to sell steel
Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!
Moreover, while we let time sap the strength
O' the walls omnipotent in menace once,
Neighbours would seem to have prepared surprise—
Run up defences in a mushroom-growth,
For all the world like what we boasted: brief—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's policy is peace!'"

Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch
Folly from fools: handsomely substitute
The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced,
For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,
Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start.
No! he said "Hear the truth, and bear the truth,
And bring the truth to bear on all you are
And do, assured that only good comes thence
Whate'er the shape good take! While I have rule,
Understand!—war for war's sake, war for sake
O' the good war gets you as war's soul excuse,
Is damnable and damned shall be. You want
Glory? Why so do I, and so does God.
Where is it found,—in this paraded shame,—
One particle of glory? Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory. Now, you fain would war
Because the neighbour prospers overmuch,—
Because there has been silence half-an-hour,
Like Heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot
Announcing Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
Are minded to disturb the jubilee,—
Because the loud tradition echoes faint,
And who knows but posterity may doubt
If the great deeds were ever done at all,
Much less believe, were such to do again,
So the event would follow: therefore, prove
The old power, at the expense of somebody!
Oh Glory,—gilded bubble, bard and sage
So nickname rightly,—would thy dance endure
One moment, would thy vaunting make believe
Only one eye thy ball was solid gold,
Hadst thou less breath to buoy thy vacancy
Than a whole multitude expends in praise,
Less range for roaming than from head to head
Of a whole people? Flit, fall, fly again,
Only, fix never where the resolute hand
May prick thee, prove the glassy lie thou art!
Give me real intellect to reason with,
No multitude, no entity that apes
One wise man, being but a million fools!
How and whence wishest glory, thou wise one?

Wouldst get it,—didst thyself guide Providence,—
By stinting of his due each neighbour round
In strength and knowledge and dexterity
So as to have thy littleness grow large
By all those somethings once, turned nothings now,
As children make a molehill mountainous
By scooping out a trench around their pile,
And saving so the mudwork from approach?
Quite otherwise the cheery game of life,
True yet mimetic warfare, whereby man
Does his best with his utmost, and so ends
A victor most of all in fair defeat.
Who thinks,—would he have no one think beside?
Who knows, who does,—save his must learning die
And action cease? Why, so our giant proves
No better than a dwarf, once rivalry
Prostrate around him. Let the whole race stand
For him to try conclusions fairly with!
Show me the great man would engage his peer
Rather by grinning 'Cheat, thy gold is brass!'
Than granting 'Perfect piece of purest ore!
Still, is it less good mintage, this of mine?'
Well, and these right and sound results of soul
I' the strong and healthy one wise man,—shall such
Be vainly sought for, scornfully renounced
I' the multitude that make the entity—
The people?—to what purpose, if no less,
In power and purity of soul, below
The reach of the unit than, by multiplied
Might of the body, vulgarized the more,
Above, in thick and threefold brutishness?
See! you accept such one wise man, myself:
Wiser or less wise, still I operate
From my own stock of wisdom, nor exact
Of other sort of natures you admire,
That whoso rhymes a sonnet pays a tax,
Who paints a landscape dips brush at his cost,
Who scores a septett true for strings and wind
Mulcted must be—else how should I impose
Properly, attitudinize aright,
Did such conflicting claims as these divert
Hohenstiel-Schwangau from observing me?
Therefore, what I find facile, you be sure,
With effort or without it, you shall dare—
You, I aspire to make my better self
And truly the Great Nation. No more war
For war's sake, then! and,—seeing, wickedness
Springs out of folly,—no more foolish dread
O' the neighbour waxing too inordinate
A rival, through his gain of wealth and ease!
What?—keep me patient, Powers!—the people here,
Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride
Above her pride i' the race all flame and air
And aspiration to the boundless Great,
The incommensurably Beautiful—
Whose very falterings groundward come of flight
Urged by a pinion all too passionate
For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:
Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave
Doers, exalt in Science, rapturous
In Art, the—more than all—magnetic race
To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind
Hohenstiel-Schwangau-fashion,—these, what?—these
Will have to abdicate their primacy
Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed,
And such another take itself, on hire
For the natural sen'night, somebody for lord
Unpatronized by me whose back was turned?
Or such another yet would fain build bridge,
Lay rail, drive tunnel, busy its poor self
With its appropriate fancy: so there's—flash—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau up in arms at once!
Genius has somewhat of the infantine:
But of the childish, not a touch nor taint
Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,
Is certain, soon or late, of punishment
Which Providence avert!—and that it may
Avert what both of us would so deserve,
No foolish dread o' the neighbour, I enjoin!
By consequence, no wicked war with him,
While I rule!

"Does that mean—no war at all
When just the wickedness I here proscribe
Comes, haply, from the neighbour? Does my speech

Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth,—right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,
No pettiness of man's admeasurement,—
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart
And hand to push it out of mankind's path—
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized—
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!
And such a lie, before both man and God,
Proving, at this time present, Austria's rule
O'er Italy,—for Austria's sake the first,
Italy's next, and our sake last of all,
Come with me and deliver Italy!
Smite hip and thigh until the oppressor leave
Free from the Adriatic to the Alps
The oppressed one! We were they who laid her low
In the old bad day when Villany braved Truth
And Right, and laughed 'Henceforward, God deposed,
Satan we set to rule for evermore
I' the world!'—whereof to stop the consequence,
And for atonement of false glory there
Gaped at and gabbled over by the world,
I purpose to get God enthroned again
For what the world will gird at as sheer shame
I' the cost of blood and treasure. 'All for nought—
Not even, say, some patch of province, splice
O' the frontier?—some snug honorarium-fee
Shut into glove and pocketed apace?'
(Questions Sagacity) 'in deference
To the natural susceptibility
Of folks at home, unwitting of that pitch
You soar to, and misdoubting if Truth, Right
And the other such augustnesses repay
Expenditure in coin o' the realm,—but prompt
To recognize the cession of Savoy
And Nice as marketable value!' No,
Sagacity, go preach to Metternich,
And, sermon ended, stay where he resides!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, you and I must march
The other road! war for the hate of war,
Not love, this once!" So Italy was free.

What else noteworthy and commendable
I' the man's career?—that he was resolute
No trepidation, much less treachery
On his part, should imperil from its poise
The ball o' the world, heaved up at such expense
Of pains so far, and ready to rebound,
Let but a finger maladroitly fall,
Under pretence of making fast and sure
The inch gained by late volubility,
And run itself back to the ancient rest
At foot o' the mountain. Thus he ruled, gave proof
The world had gained a point, progressive so,
By choice, this time, as will and power concurred,
O' the fittest man to rule; not chance of birth,
Or such-like dice-throw. Oft Sagacity
Was at his ear: "Confirm this clear advance,
Support this wise procedure! You, elect
O' the people, mean to justify their choice
And out-king all the kingly imbeciles;
But that's just half the enterprise: remains
You find them a successor like yourself,
In head and heart and eye and hand and aim,
Or all done's undone; and whom hope to mould
So like you as the pupil Nature sends,
The son and heir's completeness which you lack?
Lack it no longer! Wed the pick o' the world,
Where'er you think you find it. Should she be

A queen,—tell Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
'So do the old enthroned decrepitudes
Acknowledge, in the rotten hearts of them,
Their knell is knolled, they hasten to make peace
With the new order, recognize in me
Your right to constitute what king you will,
Cringe therefore crown in hand and bride on arm,
To both of us: we triumph, I suppose!'
Is it the other sort of rank?—bright eye,
Soft smile, and so forth, all her queenly boast?
Undaunted the exordium—'I, the man
O' the people, with the people mate myself:
So stand, so fall. Kings, keep your crowns and brides!
Our progeny (if Providence agree)
Shall live to tread the baubles underfoot
And bid the scarecrows consort with their kin.
For son, as for his sire, be the free wife
In the free state!'"

That is, Sagacity
Would prop up one more lie, the most of all
Pernicious fancy that the son and heir
Receives the genius from the sire, himself
Transmits as surely,—ask experience else!
Which answers,—never was so plain a truth
As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame
Just where He wills on earth: sometimes where man
Seems to tempt—such the accumulated store
Of faculties—one spark to fire the heap;
Sometimes where, fire-ball-like, it falls upon
The naked unpreparedness of rock,
Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.
Faculties, fuel for the flame? All helps
Come, ought to come, or come not, crossed by chance,
From culture and transmission. What's your want
I' the son and heir? Sympathy, aptitude,
Teachableness, the fuel for the flame?
You'll have them for your pains: but the flame's self,
The novel thought of God shall light the world?
No, poet, though your offspring rhyme and chime
I' the cradle,—painter, no, for all your pet
Draws his first eye, beats Salvatore's boy,—
And thrice no, statesman, should your progeny
Tie bib and tucker with no tape but red,
And made a foolscap kite of protocols!
Critic and copyist and bureaucrat
To heart's content! The seed o' the apple-tree
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
'Tis the great gardener grafts the excellence
On wildings where he will.

"How plain I view,
Across those misty years 'twixt me and Rome"—
(Such the man's answer to Sagacity)
"The little wayside temple, half-way down
To a mild river that makes oxen white
Miraculously, un-mouse-colours skin,
Or so the Roman country people dream!
I view that sweet small shrub-embedded shrine
On the declivity, was sacred once
To a transmuting Genius of the land,
Could touch and turn its dunnest natures bright,
—Since Italy means the Land of the Ox, we know.
Well, how was it the due succession fell
From priest to priest who ministered i' the cool
Calm fane o' the Clitumnian god? The sire
Brought forth a son and sacerdotal sprout,
Endowed instinctively with good and grace
To suit the gliding gentleness below—
Did he? Tradition tells another tale.
Each priest obtained his predecessor's staff,
Robe, fillet and insignia, blamelessly,
By springing out of ambush, soon or late,
And slaying him: the initiative rite
Simply was murder, save that murder took,
I' the case, another and religious name.
So it was once, is now, shall ever be
With genius and its priesthood in this world:
The new power slays the old—but handsomely.
There he lies, not diminished by an inch
Of stature that he graced the altar with,
Though somebody of other bulk and build

Cries 'What a goodly personage lies here
Reddening the water where the bulrush roots!
May I conduct the service in his place,
Decently and in order, as did he,
And, as he did not, keep a wary watch
When meditating 'neath yon willow shade!'
Find out your best man, sure the son of him
Will prove best man again, and, better still
Somehow than best, the grandson-prodigy!
You think the world would last another day
Did we so make us masters of the trick
Whereby the works go, we could pre-arrange
Their play and reach perfection when we please?
Depend on it, the change and the surprise
Are part o' the plan: 'tis we wish steadiness;
Nature prefers a motion by unrest,
Advancement through this force which jostles that.
And so, since much remains i' the world to see,
Here's the world still, affording God the sight."
Thus did the man refute Sagacity
Ever at this old whisper in his ear:
"Here are you picked out, by a miracle,
And placed conspicuously enough, folks say
And you believe, by Providence outright
Taking a new way—nor without success—
To put the world upon its mettle: good!
But Fortune alternates with Providence;
Resource is soon exhausted. Never count
On such a happy hit occurring twice!
Try the old method next time!"

"Old enough,"
(At whisper in his ear, the laugh outbroke)
"And mode the most discredited of all,
By just the men and women who make boast
They are kings and queens thereby! Mere self-defence
Should teach them, on one chapter of the law
Must be no sort of trifling—chastity:
They stand or fall, as their progenitors
Were chaste or unchaste. Now, run eye around
My crowned acquaintance, give each life its look
And no more,—why, you'd think each life was led
Purposely for example of what pains
Who leads it took to cure the prejudice,
And prove there's nothing so unproveable
As who is who, what son of what a sire,
And,—inferentially,—how faint the chance
That the next generation needs to fear
Another fool o' the selfsame type as he
Happily regnant now by right divine
And luck o' the pillow! No: select your lord
By the direct employment of your brains
As best you may,—bad as the blunder prove,
A far worse evil stank beneath the sun
When some legitimate blockhead managed so
Matters that high time was to interfere,
Though interference came from hell itself
And not the blind mad miserable mob
Happily ruled so long by pillow-luck
And divine right,—by lies in short, not truth.
And meanwhile use the allotted minute . . ."

One,—
Two, three, four, five—yes, five the *pendule* warns!
Eh? Why, this wild work wanders past all bound
And bearing! Exile, Leicester-square, the life
I' the old gay miserable time, rehearsed,
Tried on again like cast clothes, still to serve
At a pinch, perhaps? "Who's who?" was aptly asked,
Since certainly I am not I! since when?
Where is the bud-mouthed arbitress? A nod
Out-Homering Homer! Stay—there flits the clue
I fain would find the end of! Yes,—"Meanwhile,
Use the allotted minute!" Well, you see,
(Veracious and imaginary Thiers,
Who map out thus the life I might have led,
But did not,—all the worse for earth and me—

Doff spectacles, wipe pen, shut book, decamp !)
You see 'tis easy in heroics ! Plain
Pedestrian speech shall help me perorate.
Ah, if one had no need to use the tongue !
How obvious and how easy 'tis to talk
Inside the soul, a ghostly dialogue—
Instincts with guesses,—instinct, guess, again
With dubious knowledge, half-experience : each
And all the interlocutors alike
Subordinating,—as decorum bids,
Oh, never fear ! but still decisively,—
Claims from without that take too high a tone,
—("God wills this, man wants that, the dignity
Prescribed a prince would wish the other thing")—
Putting them back to insignificance
Beside one intimatest fact—myself
Am first to be considered, since I live
Twenty years longer and then end, perhaps !
But, where one ceases to soliloquize,
Somehow the motives, that did well enough
I' the darkness, when you bring them into light
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye
And organ for the upper magnitudes.
The other common creatures, of less fine
Existence, that acknowledge earth and heaven,
Have it their own way in the argument.
Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say—one's aim
Was—what it peradventure should have been :
To renovate a people, mend or end
That bane come of a blessing meant the world—
Inordinate culture of the sense made quick
By soul,—the lust o' the flesh, lust of the eye,
And pride of life,—and, consequent on these,
The worship of that prince o' the power o' the air
Who paints the cloud and fills the emptiness
And bids his votaries, famishing for truth,
Feed on a lie.

Alack, one lies oneself
Even in the stating that one's end was truth,
Truth only, if one states as much in words !
Give me the inner chamber of the soul
For obvious easy argument ! 'tis there
One pits the silent truth against a lie—
Truth which breaks shell a careless simple bird,
Nor wants a gorget nor a beak filed fine,
Steel spurs, and the whole armoury o' the tongue,
To equalize the odds. But, do your best,
Words have to come : and somehow words deflect
As the best cannon ever rifled will.

"Deflect" indeed ! nor merely words from thoughts
But names from facts : "Clitumnus"[1] did I say ?
As if it had been his ox-whitening wave
Whereby folk practised that grim cult of old—
The murder of their temple's priest by who
Would qualify for his succession. Sure—
Nemi was the true lake's style. Dream had need
Of the ox-whitening piece of prettiness
And so confused names, well known once awake.

So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester-square,
Alone,—no such congenial intercourse !—
My reverie concludes, as dreaming should,
With daybreak : nothing done and over yet,
Except cigars ! The adventure thus may be,
Or never needs to be at all : who knows ?
My Cousin-Duke, perhaps, at whose hard head
—Is it, now—is this letter to be launched,
The sight of whose grey oblong, whose grim seal,
Set all these fancies floating for an hour ?

Twenty years are good gain, come what come will !
Double or quits ! The letter goes ! Or stays ?

[1] An Italian river supposed to turn cattle white.

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

1872

[For an analysis of this remarkable poem, see Dr. Berdoe's "Browning Cyclopædia" (Swan Sonnenschein & Co.) and Mr. Nettleship's "Essays on Browning's Poetry."]

DONE ELVIRE.

Vous plaît-il, don Juan, nous éclaircir ces beaux mystères?

DON JUAN.

Madame, à vous dire la vérité . . .

DONE ELVIRE.

Ah! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses! J'ai pitié de vous voir la confusion que vous avez. Que ne vous armez-vous le front d'une noble effronterie? Que ne me jurez-vous que vous êtes toujours dans les mêmes sentimens pour moi, que vous m'aimez toujours avec une ardeur sans égale, et que rien n'est capable de vous détacher de moi que la mort?—MOLIÈRE, *Don Juan*, acte i. sc. 3.

DONNA ELVIRA.

Don Juan, might you please to help one give a guess,
Hold up a candle, clear this fine mysteriousness?

DON JUAN.

Madam, if needs I must declare the truth,—in short . . .

DONNA ELVIRA.

Fie, for a man of mode, accustomed at the court
To such a style of thing, how awkwardly my lord
Attempts defence! You move compassion, that's the word—
Dumb-foundered and chap-fallen! Why don't you arm your brow
With noble impudence? Why don't you swear and vow
No sort of change is come to any sentiment
You ever had for me? Affection holds the bent,
You love me now as erst, with passion that makes pale
All ardour else: nor aught in nature can avail
To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath,
May peradventure stop devotion likewise—death!

PROLOGUE.

AMPHIBIAN.

I.

THE fancy I had to-day,
Fancy which turned a fear!
I swam far out in the bay,
Since waves laughed warm and clear

II.

I lay and looked at the sun,
The noon-sun looked at me:
Between us two, no one
Live creature, that I could see.

III.

Yes! There came floating by
Me, who lay floating too.
Such a strange butterfly!
Creature as dear as new:

IV.

Because the membraned wings
So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
Like soul and nought beside.

V.

A handbreadth over head!
All of the sea my own,
It owned the sky instead;
Both of us were alone.

VI.

I never shall join its flight,
For, nought buoys flesh in air.
If it touch the sea—good night!
Death sure and swift waits there.

VII.

Can the insect feel the better
For watching the uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
Pretend as they were not clay?

VIII.

Undoubtedly I rejoice
That the air comports so well
With a creature which had the choice
Of the land once. Who can tell?

IX.

What if a certain soul
Which early slipped its sheath,
And has for its home the whole
Of heaven, thus look beneath,

X.

Thus watch one who, in the world,
Both lives and likes life's way,
Nor wishes the wings unfurled
That sleep in the worm, they say?

XI.

But sometimes when the weather
Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free oneself of tether,
And try a life exempt

XII.

From worldly noise and dust,
In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought,—why, just
Unable to fly, one swims!

XIII.

By passion and thought upborne,
One smiles to oneself—"They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
Our sea, who live in the air!"

XIV.

Emancipate through passion
And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
For heaven—poetry:

XV.

Which sea, to all intent,
Gives flesh such noon-disport
As a finer element
Affords the spirit-sort.

XVI.

Whatever they are, we seem:
Imagine the thing they know;
All deeds they do, we dream;
Can heaven be else but so?

XVII.

And meantime, yonder streak
Meets the horizon's verge;
That is the land, to seek
If we tire or dread the surge:

XVIII.

Land the solid and safe—
To welcome again (confess!)
When, high and dry, we chafe
The body, and don the dress.

XIX.

Does she look, pity, wonder
At one who mimics flight,
Swims—heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

I.

O TRIP and skip, Elvire! Link arm in arm with me!
Like husband and like wife, together let us see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

II.

Now, who supposed the night would play us such a prank?
—That what was raw and brown, rough pole and shaven plank?

Mere bit of hoarding, half by trestle propped, half tub,
Would flaunt it forth as brisk as butterfly from grub?
This comes of sun and air, of Autumn afternoon,
And Pornic and Saint Gille, whose feast affords the boon—
This scaffold turned parterre, this flower-bed in full blow,
Bateleurs, baladines![1] We shall not miss the show!
They pace and promenade; they presently will dance:
What good were else i' the drum and fife? O pleasant land of France!

III.

Who saw them make their entry? At wink of eve, be sure!
They love to steal a march, nor lightly risk the lure.
They keep their treasure hid, nor stale (improvident)
Before the time is ripe, each wonder of their tent—
Yon six-legged sheep, to wit, and he who beats a gong,
Lifts cap and waves salute, exhilarates the throng—
Their ape of many years and much adventure, grim
And grey with pitying fools who find a joke in him.
Or, best, the human beauty, Mimi, Toinette, Fifine,
Tricot fines down if fat, padding plumps up if lean,
Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to gamesome boys.

IV.

No, no, thrice, Pornic, no! Perpend the authentic tale!
'Twas not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!

[1] Conjurors and dancers.

But whoso went his rounds, when flew bat, flitted midge,
Might hear across the dusk,—where both roads join the bridge,
Hard by the little port,—creak a slow caravan,
A chimneyed house on wheels; so shyly-sheathed, began
To broaden out the bud which, bursting unaware,
Now takes away our breath, queen-tulip of the Fair!

V.

Yet morning promised much: for, pitched and slung and reared
On terrace 'neath the tower, 'twixt tree and tree appeared
An airy structure; how the pennon from its dome,
Frenetic[2] to be free, makes one red stretch for home!
The home far and away, the distance where lives joy,
The cure, at once and ever, of world and world's annoy;
Since, what lolls full in front, a furlong from the booth,
But ocean-idleness, sky-blue and millpond-smooth?

VI.

Frenetic to be free! And, do you know, there beats
Something within my breast, as sensitive?—repeats
The fever of the flag? My heart makes just the same
Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness, lays claim
To share the life they lead: losels, who have and use
The hour what way they will,—applaud them or abuse
Society, whereof myself am at the beck,
Whose call obey, and stoop to burden stiffest neck!

[2] Frenzied.

VII.

Why is it that whene'er a faithful few combine
To cast allegiance off, play truant, nor repine,
Agree to bear the worst, forego the best in store
For us who, left behind, do duty as of yore,—
Why is it that, disgraced, they seem to relish life the more?
—Seem as they said "We know a secret passing praise
Or blame of such as you! Remain! we go our ways
With something you o'erlooked, forgot or chose to sweep
Clean out of door: our pearl picked from your rubbish-heap.
You care not for your loss, we calculate our gain.
All's right. Are you content? Why, so let things remain!
To the wood then, to the wild: free life, full liberty!"
And when they rendezvous beneath the inclement sky,
House by the hedge, reduced to brute-companionship,
—Misguided ones who gave society the slip,
And find too late how boon a parent they despised,
What ministration spurned, how sweet and civilized—
Then, left alone at last with self-sought wretchedness,
No interloper else!—why is it, can we guess?—
At somebody's expense, goes up so frank a laugh?
As though they held the corn, and left us only chaff
From garners crammed and closed. And we indeed are clever
If we get grain as good, by thrashing straw for ever!

VIII.

Still, truants as they are and purpose yet to be,
That nowise needs forbid they venture—as you see—
To cross confine, approach the once familiar roof
O' the kindly race their flight estranged: stand half aloof,
Sidle half up, press near, and proffer wares for sale
—In their phrase—make, in ours, white levy of black mail.
They, of the wild, require some touch of us the tame,
Since clothing, meat and drink, mean money all the same.

IX.

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good:
Must snatch up, bear away in beak, the trifle-treasure
To wood and wild, and then—O how enjoy at leisure!
Was never tree-built nest, you climbed and took, of bird
(Rare city-visitant, talked of, scarce seen or heard),
But, when you would dissect the structure, piece by piece,
You found, enwreathed amid the country-product—fleece
And feather, thistle-fluffs and bearded windle-straws [1]—
Some shred of foreign silk, unravelling of gauze,
Bit, may be, of brocade, mid fur and blow-bell-down:
Filched plainly from mankind, dear tribute paid by town,
Which proved how oft the bird had plucked up heart of grace,
Swooped down at waif and stray, made furtively our place
Pay tax and toll, then borne the booty to enrich
Her paradise i' the waste; the how and why of which,
That is the secret, there the mystery that stings!

[1] The tufted hair-grass.

X.

For, what they traffic in, consists of just the things
We,—proud ones who so scorn dwellers without the pale,
Bateleurs, baladines, white leviers of black mail,—
I say, they sell what we most pique us that we keep!
How comes it, all we hold so dear they count so cheap?

XI.

What price should you impose, for instance, on repute,
Good fame, your own good fame and family's to boot?
Stay start of quick moustache, arrest the angry rise
Of eyebrow! All I asked is answered by surprise.
Now tell me: are you worth the cost of a cigar?
Go boldly, enter booth, disburse the coin at bar
Of doorway where presides the master of the troop,
And forthwith you survey his Graces in a group,
Live Picture, picturesque no doubt and close to life:
His sisters, right and left; the Grace in front, his wife.
Next, who is this performs the feat of the Trapeze?
Lo, she is launched, look—fie, the fairy!—how she flees
O'er all those heads thrust back,—mouths, eyes, one gape and stare,—
No scrap of skirt impedes free passage through the air,
Till, plumb on the other side, she lights and laughs again,
That fairy-form, whereof each muscle, nay, each vein
The curious may inspect,—his daughter that he sells
Each rustic for five sous. Desiderate aught else
O' the vendor? As you leave his show, why, joke the man!

"You cheat: your six-legged sheep, I recollect, began
Both life and trade, last year, trimmed properly and clipt,
As the Twin-headed Babe, and Human Nondescript!"
What does he care? You paid his price, may pass your jest.
So values he repute, good fame, and all the rest!

XII.

But try another tack; say: "I indulge caprice,
Who am Don and Duke, and Knight, beside, o' the Golden Fleece,
And, never mind how rich. Abandon this career!
Have hearth and home, nor let your womankind appear
Without as multiplied a coating as protects
An onion from the eye! Become, in all respects,
God-fearing householder, subsistent by brain-skill,
Hand-labour; win your bread whatever way you will,
So it be honestly,—and, while I have a purse,
Means shall not lack!"—His thanks will be the roundest curse
That ever rolled from lip.

XIII.

Now, what is it?—returns
The question—heartens so this losel that he spurns
All we so prize? I want, put down in black and white,
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution—wealth,
Vice—virtue, and disease of soul and body—health?

XIV.

Ah, the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile,
The sigh almost a sob! What's wrong, was right erewhile?

Why are we two at once such ocean-width
apart?
Pale fingers press my arm, and sad eyes
probe my heart.
Why is the wife in trouble?

XV.

This way, this way, Fifine!
Here's she, shall make my thoughts be surer
what they mean!
First let me read the signs, pourtray you past
mistake
The gipsy's foreign self, no swarth our sun
could bake.
Yet where's a woolly trace degrades the wiry
hair?
And note the Greek-nymph nose, and—oh,
my Hebrew pair
Of eye and eye—o'erarched by velvet of the
mole—
That swim as in a sea, that dip and rise and roll,
Spilling the light around! While either ear
is cut
Thin as a dusk-leaved rose carved from a
cocoa-nut.
And then, her neck! now, grant you had the
power to deck,
Just as your fancy pleased, the bistre-length
of neck,
Could lay, to shine against its shade, a
moonlike row
Of pearls, each round and white as bubble
Cupids blow
Big out of mother's milk,—what pearl-moon
would surpass
That string of mock-turquoise, those alman-
dines[1] of glass,
Where girlhood terminates? for with breasts'-
birth commence
The boy, and page-costume, till pink and
impudence
End admirably all: complete the creature trips
Our way now, brings sunshine upon her
spangled hips,
As here she fronts us full, with pose half-
frank, half-fierce!

[1] Garnets.

XVI.

Words urged in vain, Elvire! You waste
your quarte and tierce,
Lunge at a phantom here, try fence in fairy-
land.
For me, I own defeat, ask but to understand
The acknowledged victory of whom I call my
queen,
Sexless and bloodless sprite: though mis-
chievous and mean,
Yet free and flower-like too, with loveliness
for law,
And self-sustainment made morality.

XVII.

A flaw
Do you account i' the lily, of lands which
travellers know,
That, just as golden gloom supersedes Northern
snow
I' the chalice, so, about each pistil, spice is
packed,—
Deliriously-drugged scent, in lieu of odour
lacked,
With us, by bee and moth, their banquet to
enhance
At morn and eve, when dew, the chilly sus-
tenance,
Needs mixture of some chaste and temperate
perfume?
I ask, is she in fault who guards such golden
gloom,
Such dear and damning scent, by who cares
what devices,
And takes the idle life of insects she entices
When, drowned to heart's desire, they satiate
the inside
O' the lily, mark her wealth and manifest her
pride?

XVIII.

But, wiser, we keep off, nor tempt the
acrid juice;
Discreet we peer and praise, put rich things
to right use.
No flavourous venomed bell,—the rose it is,
I wot,
Only the rose, we pluck and place, unwronged
a jot,

No worse for homage done by every devotee,
I' the proper loyal throne, on breast where rose should be.
Or if the simpler sweets we have to choose among,
Would taste between our teeth, and give its toy the tongue,—
O gorgeous poison-plague, on thee no hearts are set!
We gather daisy meek, or maiden violet:
I think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine.

XIX.

"How does she make my thoughts be sure of what they mean?"
Judge and be just! Suppose, an age and time long past
Renew for our behoof one pageant more, the last
O' the kind, sick Louis liked to see defile between
Him and the yawning grave, its passage served to screen.
With eye as grey as lead, with cheek as brown as bronze,
Here where we stand, shall sit and suffer Louis Onze:
The while from yonder tent parade forth, not —oh, no—
Bateleurs, baladines! but range themselves a-row
Those well-sung women-worthies whereof loud fame still finds
Some echo linger faint, less in our hearts than minds.

XX.

See, Helen! pushed in front o' the world's worst night and storm,
By Lady Venus' hand on shoulder: the sweet form
Shrinkingly prominent, though mighty, like a moon
Outbreaking from a cloud, to put harsh things in tune,
And magically bring mankind to acquiesce
In its own ravage,—call no curse upon, but bless
(Beldame, a moment since) the outbreaking beauty, now,
That casts o'er all the blood a candour from her brow.
See, Cleopatra! bared, the entire and sinuous wealth
O' the shining shape; each orb of indolent ripe health,
Captured, just where it finds a fellow-orb as fine
I' the body: traced about by jewels which outline,
Fire-frame, and keep distinct, perfections—lest they melt
To soft smooth unity ere half their hold be felt:
Yet, o'er that white and wonder, a soul's predominance
I' the head so high and haught—except one thievish glance,
From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain.
Hush,—O I know, Elvire! Be patient, more remain!
What say you to Saint . . . Pish! Whatever Saint you please,
Cold-pinnacled aloft o' the spire, prays calm the seas
From Pornic Church, and oft at midnight (peasants say)
Goes walking out to save from shipwreck: well she may!
For think how many a year has she been conversant
With nought but winds and rains, sharp courtesy and scant
O' the wintry snow that coats the pent-house of her shrine,
Covers each knee, climbs near, but spares the smile benign
Which seems to say "I looked for scarce so much from earth!"
She follows, one long thin pure finger in the girth
O' the girdle—whence the folds of garment, eye and eye,
Besprent with fleurs-de-lys, flow down and multiply

Around her feet,—and one, pressed hushingly to lip:
As if, while thus we made her march, some foundering ship
Might miss her from her post, nearer to God half-way
In heaven, and she inquired "Who that treads earth can pray?
I doubt if even she, the unashamed! though, sure,
She must have stripped herself only to clothe the poor."

XXI.

This time, enough's a feast, not one more form, Elvire!
Provided you allow that, bringing up the rear
O' the bevy I am loth to—by one bird—curtail,
First note may lead to last, an octave crown the scale,
And this feminity be followed—do not flout!—
By—who concludes the masque with curtsey, smile and pout,
Submissive-mutinous? No other than Fifine
Points toe, imposes haunch, and pleads with tambourine!

XXII.

"Well, what's the meaning here, what does the masque intend,
Which, unabridged, we saw file past us, with no end
Of fair ones, till Fifine came, closed the catalogue?"

XXIII.

Task fancy yet again! Suppose you cast this clog
Of flesh away (that weeps, upbraids, withstands my arm)
And pass to join your peers, paragon charm with charm,
As I shall show you may,—prove best of beauty there!
Yourself confront yourself! This, help me to declare
That yonder-you, who stand beside these, braving each
And blinking none, beat her who lured to Troy-town beach
The purple prows of Greece,—nay, beat Fifine; whose face,
Mark how I will inflame, when seigneur-like I place
I' the tambourine, to spot the strained and piteous blank
Of pleading parchment, see, no less than a whole franc!

XXIV.

Ah, do you mark the brown o' the cloud, made bright with fire
Through and through? as, old wiles succeeding to desire,
Quality (you and I) once more compassionate
A hapless infant, doomed (fie on such partial fate!)
To sink the inborn shame, waive privilege of sex,
And posture as you see, support the nods and becks
Of clowns that have their stare, nor always pay its price;
An infant born perchance as sensitive and nice
As any soul of you, proud dames, whom destiny
Keeps uncontaminate from stigma of the stye
She wallows in! You draw back skirts from filth like her
Who, possibly, braves scorn, if, scorned, she minister
To age, want, and disease of parents one or both;
Nay, peradventure, stoops to degradation, loth
That some just-budding sister, the dew yet on the rose,
Should have to share in turn the ignoble trade,—who knows?

XXV.

Ay, who indeed! Myself know nothing, but dare guess
That off she trips in haste to hand the booty . . . yes,

'Twixt fold and fold of tent, there looms he, dim-discerned,
The ogre, lord of all those lavish limbs have earned!
—Brute-beast-face,—ravage, scar, scowl and malignancy,—
O' the Strong Man, whom (no doubt, her husband) by-and-by
You shall behold do feats: lift up nor quail beneath
A quintal[1] in each hand, a cart-wheel 'twixt his teeth.
Oh she prefers sheer strength to ineffective grace,
Breeding and culture! seeks the essential in the case!
To him has flown my franc; and welcome, if that squint
O' the diabolic eye so soften through absinthe,
That, for once, tambourine, tunic and tricot[2] 'scape
Their customary curse "Not half the gain o' the ape!"
Ay, they go in together!

XXVI.

Yet still her phantom stays
Opposite, where you stand: as steady 'neath our gaze—
The live Elvire's and mine—though fancy-stuff and mere
Illusion; to be judged,—dream-figures,—without fear
Or favour, those the false, by you and me the true.

XXVII.

"What puts it in my head to make yourself judge you?"
Well, it may be, the name of Helen brought to mind
A certain myth I mused in years long left behind:
How she that fled from Greece with Paris whom she loved,
And came to Troy, and there found shelter, and so proved
Such cause of the world's woe,—how she, old stories call
This creature, Helen's self, never saw Troy at all.
Jove had his fancy-fit, must needs take empty air,
Fashion her likeness forth, and set the phantom there
I' the midst for sport, to try conclusions with the blind
And blundering race, the game create for Gods, mankind:
Experiment on these,—establish who would yearn
To give up life for her, who, other-minded, spurn
The best her eyes could smile,—make half the world sublime,
And half absurd, for just a phantom all the time!
Meanwhile true Helen's self sat, safe and far away,
By a great river-side, beneath a purer day,
With solitude around, tranquillity within;
Was able to lean forth, look, listen, through the din
And stir; could estimate the worthlessness or worth
Of Helen who inspired such passion to the earth,
A phantom all the time! That put it in my head,
To make yourself judge you—the phantom-wife instead
O' the tearful true Elvire!

XXVIII.

I thank the smile at last
Which thins away the tear! Our sky was overcast,
And something fell; but day clears up: if there chanced rain,
The landscape glistens more. I have not vexed in vain
Elvire: because she knows, now she has stood the test,
How, this and this being good, herself may still be best

[1] A weight of 100 lbs. [2] A jersey.

O' the beauty in review; because the flesh that claimed
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed
In me, for things extern, was all mistake, she finds,—
Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures,—
All by demonstrating the value of Fifine!

XXIX.

Partake my confidence! No creature's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth: fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.
Where is the single grain of sand, mid millions heaped
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped
Or will leap, would we wait, i' the century, some once,
To the very throne of things?—earth's brightest for the nonce,
When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette
Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet
Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's name!
As firm is my belief, quick sense perceives the same
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the plan,
No detail but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.

XXX.

Witness her, kept waiting all this time!
What happy angle makes Fifine reverberate
Sunshine, least sand-grain, she, of shadiest social state?
No adamantine shield, polished like Helen there,
Fit to absorb the sun, regorge him till the glare,
Dazing the universe, draw Troy-ward those blind beaks
Of equal-sided ships rowed by the well-greaved Greeks!
No Asian mirror, like yon Ptolemaic witch
Able to fix sun fast and tame sun down, enrich,
Not burn the world with beams thus flatteringly rolled
About her, head to foot, turned slavish snakes of gold!
And oh, no tinted pane of oriel sanctity,
Does our Fifine afford, such as permits supply
Of lustrous heaven, revealed, far more than mundane sight
Could master, to thy cell, pure Saint! where, else too bright,
So suits thy sense the orb, that, what outside was noon,
Pales, through thy lozenged blue, to meek benefic moon!
What then? does that prevent each dunghill, we may pass
Daily, from boasting too its bit of looking-glass,
Its sherd which, sun-smit, shines, shoots arrowy fire beyond
That satin-muffled mope, your sulky diamond?

XXXI.

And now, the mingled ray she shoots, I decompose.
Her antecedents, take for execrable! Gloze
No whit on your premiss: let be, there was no worst
Of degradation spared Fifine: ordained from first
To last, in body and soul, for one life-long debauch,
The Pariah of the North, the European Nautch!

This, far from seek to hide, she puts in evidence
Calmly, displays the brand, bids pry without offence
Your finger on the place. You comment "Fancy us
So operated on, maltreated, mangled thus!
Such torture in our case, had we survived an hour?
Some other sort of flesh and blood must be, with power
Appropriate to the vile, unsensitive, tough-thonged,
In lieu of our fine nerve! Be sure, she was not wronged
Too much: you must not think she winced at prick as we!"
Come, come, that's what you say, or would, were thoughts but free.

XXXII.

Well then, thus much confessed, what wonder if there steal
Unchallenged to my heart the force of one appeal
She makes, and justice stamp the sole claim she asserts?
So absolutely good is truth, truth never hurts
The teller, whose worst crime gets somehow grace, avowed.
To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud
"Know all of me outside, the rest be emptiness
For such as you! I call attention to my dress,
Coiffure, outlandish features, lithe memorable limbs,
Piquant entreaty, all that eye-glance over-skims.
Does this give pleasure? Then, repay the pleasure, put
Its price i' the tambourine! Do you seek further? Tut!
I'm just my instrument,—sound hollow: mere smooth skin
Stretched o'er gilt framework, I: rub-dub, nought else within—
Always, for such as you!—if I have use elsewhere,—
If certain bells, now mute, can jingle, need you care?
Be it enough, there's truth i' the pleading, which comports
With no word spoken out in cottages or courts,
Since all I plead is 'Pay for just the sight you see,
'And give no credit to another charm in me!'
Do I say, like your Love? 'To praise my face is well,
'But, who would know my worth, must search my heart to tell!'
Do I say, like your Wife? 'Had I passed in review
'The produce of the globe, my man of men were—you!'
Do I say, like your Helen? 'Yield yourself up, obey
'Implicitly, nor pause to question, to survey
'Even the worshipful! prostrate you at my shrine!
'Shall you dare controvert what the world counts divine?
'Array your private taste, own liking of the sense,
'Own longing of the soul, against the impudence
'Of history, the blare and bullying of verse?
'As if man ever yet saw reason to disburse
'The amount of what sense liked, soul longed for,—given, devised
'As love, forsooth,—until the price was recognized
'As moderate enough by divers fellow-men!
'Then, with his warrant safe that these would love too, then,
'Sure that particular gain implies a public loss,
'And that no smile he buys but proves a slash across
'The face, a stab into the side of somebody—
'Sure that, along with love's main-purchase, he will buy
'Up the whole stock of earth's uncharitableness,

'Envy and hatred,—then, decides he to profess
'His estimate of one, by love discerned, though dim
'To all the world beside: since what's the world to him?'
Do I say, like your Queen of Egypt? 'Who foregoes
'My cup of witchcraft—fault be on the fool! He knows
'Nothing of how I pack my wine-press, turn its winch
'Three-times-three, all the time to song and dance, nor flinch
'From charming on and on, till at the last I squeeze
'Out the exhaustive drop that leaves behind mere lees
'And dregs, vapidity, thought essence heretofore!
'Sup of my sorcery, old pleasures please no more!
'Be great, be good, love, learn, have potency of hand
'Or heart or head,—what boots? You die, nor understand
'What bliss might be in life: you ate the grapes, but knew
'Never the taste of wine, such vintage as I brew!'
Do I say, like your Saint? 'An exquisitest touch
'Bides in the birth of things: no after-time can much
'Enhance that fine, that faint, fugitive first of all!
'What colour paints the cup o' the May-rose, like the small
'Suspicion of a blush which doubtfully begins?
'What sound outwarbles brook, while, at the source, it wins
'That moss and stone dispart, allow its bubblings breathe?
'What taste excels the fruit, just where sharp flavours sheathe
'Their sting, and let encroach the honey that allays?
'And so with soul and sense; when sanctity betrays
'First fear lest earth below seem real as heaven above,
'And holy worship, late, change soon to sinful love—
'Where is the plenitude of passion which endures
'Comparison with that, I ask of amateurs?'
Do I say, like Elvire" . . .

XXXIII.

(Your husband holds you fast,
Will have you listen, learn your character at last!)
"Do I say?—like her mixed unrest and discontent,
Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent
So strangely, in the face, by sad smiles and gay tears,—
Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which endears,—
Say? 'As you loved me once, could you but love me now!
'Years probably have graved their passage on my brow,
'Lips turn more rarely red, eyes sparkle less than erst;
'Such tribute body pays to time; but, unamerced,
'The soul retains, nay, boasts old treasure multiplied.
'Though dew-prime flee,—mature at noonday, love defied
'Chance, the wind, change, the rain: love, strenuous all the more
'For storm, struck deeper root and choicer fruitage bore,
'Despite the rocking world; yet truth struck root in vain:
'While tenderness bears fruit, you praise, not taste again.
'Why? They are yours, which once were hardly yours, might go
'To grace another's ground: and then—the hopes we know,

'The fears we keep in mind !—when, ours to arbitrate,
'Your part was to bow neck, bid fall decree of fate.
'Then, O the knotty point—white-night's work to revolve—
'What meant that smile, that sigh? Not Solon's self could solve !
'Then, O the deep surmise what one word might express,
'And if what seemed her "No" may not have meant her "Yes !"
'Then, such annoy, for cause—calm welcome, such acquist
'Of rapture if, refused her arm, hand touched her wrist !
'Now, what's a smile to you? Poor candle that lights up
'The decent household gloom which sends you out to sup.
'A tear? worse ! warns that health requires you keep aloof
'From nuptial chamber, since rain penetrates the roof !
'Soul, body got and gained, inalienably safe
'Your own, become despised; more worth has any waif
'Or stray from neighbour's pale: pouch that,—'tis pleasure, pride,
'Novelty, property, and larceny beside !
'Preposterous thought ! to find no value fixed in things,
'To covet all you see, hear, dream of, till fate brings
'About that, what you want, you gain; then follows change.
'Give you the sun to keep, forthwith must fancy range:
'A goodly lamp, no doubt,—yet might you catch her hair
'And capture, as she frisks, the fen-fire dancing there !
'What do I say? at least a meteor's half in heaven;
'Provided filth but shine, my husband hankers even
'After putridity that's phosphorescent, cribs
'The rustic's tallow-rush, makes spoil of urchins' squibs,
'In short prefers to me—chaste, temperate, serene—
'What sputters green and blue, this fizgig called Fifine !'".

XXXIV.

So all your sex mistake ! Strange that so plain a fact
Should raise such dire debate ! Few families were racked
By torture self-supplied, did Nature grant but this—
That women comprehend mental analysis !

XXXV.

Elvire, do you recall when, years ago, our home
The intimation reached, a certain pride of Rome,
Authenticated piece, in the third, last and best
Manner,—whatever fools and connoisseurs contest,—
No particle disturbed by rude restorer's touch,
The palaced picture-pearl, so long eluding clutch
Of creditor, at last, the Rafael might—could we
But come to terms—change lord, pass from the Prince to me?
I think you recollect my fever of a year:
How the Prince would, and how he would not; now,—too dear
That promise was, he made his grandsire so long since,
Rather to boast "I own a Rafael" than "am Prince !"
And now, the fancy soothed—if really sell he must
His birthright for a mess of pottage—such a thrust
I' the vitals of the Prince were mollified by balm,
Could he prevail upon his stomach to bear qualm,
And bequeath Liberty (because a purchaser
Was ready with the sum—a trifle !) yes, transfer
His heart at all events to that land where, at least,

Free institutions reign! And so, its price increased
Five-fold (Americans are such importunates!),
Soon must his Rafael start for the United States.
O alternating bursts of hope now, then despair!
At last, the bargain's struck, I'm all but beggared, there
The Rafael faces me, in fine, no dream at all,
My housemate, evermore to glorify my wall.
A week must pass, before heart-palpitations sink,
In gloating o'er my gain, so late I edged the brink
Of doom; a fortnight more, I spent in Paradise:
"Was outline e'er so true, could colouring entice
So calm, did harmony and quiet so avail?
How right, how resolute, the action tells the tale!"
A month, I bid my friends congratulate their best:
"You happy Don!" (to me): "The block-head!" (to the rest):
"No doubt he thinks his daub original, poor dupe!"
Then I resume my life: one chamber must not coop
Man's life in, though it boast a marvel like my prize.
Next year, I saunter past with unaverted eyes,
Nay, loll and turn my back: perchance to overlook
With relish, leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book.

XXXVI.

Imagine that a voice reproached me from its frame:
"Here do I hang, and may! Your Rafael, just the same,
'Tis only you that change: no ecstasies of yore!
No purposed suicide distracts you any more!"
Prompt would my answer meet such frivolous attack:
"You misappropriate sensations. What men lack,
And labour to obtain, is hoped and feared about
After a fashion; what they once obtain, makes doubt,
Expectancy's old fret and fume, henceforward void.
But do they think to hold such havings unalloyed
By novel hopes and fears, of fashion just as new,
To correspond i' the scale? Nowise, I promise you!
Mine you are, therefore mine will be, as fit to cheer
My soul and glad my sense to-day as this-day-year.
So, any sketch or scrap, pochade,[1] caricature,
Made in a moment, meant a moment to endure,
I snap at, seize, enjoy, then tire of, throw aside,
Find you in your old place. But if a servant cried
'Fire in the gallery!'—methinks, were I engaged
In Doré, elbow-deep, picture-books million-paged
To the four winds would pack, sped by the heartiest curse
Was ever launched from lip, to strew the universe.
Would not I brave the best o' the burning, bear away
Either my perfect piece in safety, or else stay
And share its fate, be made its martyr nor repine?
Inextricably wed, such ashes mixed with mine!"

XXXVII.

For which I get the eye, the hand, the heart, the whole
O' the wondrous wife again!

XXXVIII.

But no, play out your *rôle*
I' the pageant! 'Tis not fit your phantom leave the stage:
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage
Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance
Claim to . . . equality? nay, but predominance

[1] A sketch.

In *physique* o'er them all, where Helen heads the scene
Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Fifine.
How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint!
My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,
Inviolate of life and worldliness and sin—
Fettered, I hold my flower, her own cup's weight would win
From off the tall slight stalk a-top of which she turns
And trembles, makes appeal to one who roughly earns
Her thanks instead of blame, (did lily only know),
By thus constraining length of lily, letting snow
Of cup-crown, that's her face, look from its guardian stake,
Superb on all that crawls beneath, and mutely make
Defiance, with the mouth's white movement of disdain,
To all that stoops, retires and hovers round again!
How windingly the limbs delay to lead up, reach
Where, crowned, the head waits calm: as if reluctant, each,
That eye should traverse quick such lengths of loveliness,
From feet, which just are found embedded in the dress
Deep swathed about with folds and flowings virginal,
Up to the pleated breasts, rebellious 'neath their pall,
As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep not death,
Must melt and so release; whereat, from the fine sheath,
The flower-cup-crown starts free, the face is unconcealed,
And what shall now divert me, once the sweet face revealed,
From all I loved so long, so lingeringly left?

XXXIX.

Because indeed your face fits into just the cleft
O' the heart of me, Elvire, makes right and whole once more
All that was half itself without you! As before,
My truant finds its place! Doubtlessly sea-shells yearn,
If plundered by sad chance: would pray their pearls return,
Let negligently slip away into the wave!
Never may eyes desist, those eyes so grey and grave,
From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within!
And, would you humour me? I dare to ask, unpin
The web of that brown hair! O'erwash o' the sudden, but
As promptly, too, disclose, on either side, the jut
Of alabaster brow! So part rich rillets dyed
Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each side
O' the rock-top, pushed by Spring!

XL.

"And where i' the world is all
This wonder, you detail so trippingly, espied?
My mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed
Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still
Loving,—a certain grace yet lingers, if you will,—
But all this wonder, where?"

XLI.

Why, where but in the sense
And soul of me, Art's judge? Art is my evidence
That something was, is, might be; but no more thing itself,
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,
The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear,—
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear,
Mine henceforth, ever mine!

XLII.

But if I would re-trace
Effect, in Art, to cause,—corroborate, erase
What's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain
By fact which gave it birth? I re-peruse in vain
The verse, I fail to find that vision of delight
I' the Bazzi's[1] lost-profile, eye-edge so exquisite.
And, music: what? that burst of pillared cloud by day
And pillared fire by night, was product, must we say,
Of modulating just, by enharmonic change,—
The augmented sixth resolved,—from out the straighter range
Of D sharp minor,—leap of disimprisoned thrall,—
Into thy light and life, D major natural?

XLIII.

Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart?
I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart
By help of the outside form,—a reason for our wild
Diversity in choice,—why each grows reconciled
To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask
Of flesh that's meant to yield,—did nature ply her task
As artist should,—precise the features of the soul,
Which, if in any case they found expression, whole
I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.
Never shall I believe any two souls were made
Similar; granting, then, each soul of every grade
Was meant to be itself, prove in itself complete
And, in completion, good,—nay, best o' the kind,—as meet
Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond
With inward substance,—flesh, the dress which soul has donned,
Exactly reproduce,—were only justice done
Inside and outside too,—types perfect everyone.
How happens it that here we meet a mystery
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why
Each soul is either made imperfect, and deserves
As rude a face to match; or else a bungler swerves,
And nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite,
—Here too much, there too little,—bids each face, more or less,
Retire from beauty, make approach to ugliness?
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to success,
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,
Evidence, to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
O' the grey, and, free again, be fire?—of worth the same,
Howe'er produced, for, great or little, flame is flame.
A mystery, whereof solution is to seek.

XLIV.

I find it in the fact that each soul, just as weak
Its own way as its fellow,—departure from design
As flagrant in the flesh,—goes striving to combine
With what shall right the wrong, the under or above
The standard: supplement unloveliness by love.
—Ask Plato else! And this corroborates the sage,
That Art,—which I may style the love of loving, rage

[1] An Italian painter.

Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
For truth's sake, whole and sole, not any good, truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside,—instinctive Art
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,
Contributes to defect, toils on till,—*fiat lux*,—
There's the restored, the prime, the individual type!

XLV.

Look, for example now! This piece of broken pipe
(Some shipman's solace erst) shall act as crayon; and
What tablet better serves my purpose than the sand?
—Smooth slab whereon I draw, no matter with what skill,
A face, and yet another, and yet another still.
There lie my three prime types of beauty!

XLVI.

Laugh your best!
"Exaggeration and absurdity?" Confessed!
Yet, what may that face mean, no matter for its nose,
A yard long, or its chin, a foot short?

XLVII.

"You suppose,
Horror?" Exactly! What's the odds if, more or less
By yard or foot, the features do manage to express
Such meaning in the main? Were I of Gérôme's force,
Nor feeble as you see, quick should my crayon course
O'er outline, curb, excite, till,—so completion speeds
With Gérôme[1] well at work,—observe how brow recedes,
Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp stare
Announces; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave: elate
Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend
All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end.
Retrenchment and addition effect a masterpiece,
Not change i' the motive: here diminish, there increase—
And who wants Horror, has it.

XLVIII.

Who wants some other show
Of soul, may seek elsewhere—this second of the row?
What does it give for germ, monadic mere intent
Of mind in face, faint first of meanings ever meant?
Why, possibly, a grin, that, strengthened, grows a laugh;
That, softened, leaves a smile; that, tempered, bids you quaff
At such a magic cup as English Reynolds once
Compounded: for the witch pulls out of you response
Like Garrick's to Thalia, however due may be
Your homage claimed by that stiff-stoled Melpomene!

XLIX.

And just this one face more! Pardon the bold pretence!
May there not lurk some hint, struggle toward evidence
In that compressed mouth, those strained nostrils, steadfast eyes
Of utter passion, absolute self-sacrifice,

[1] Modern French painter.

Which,—could I but subdue the wild grotesque, refine
That bulge of brow, make blunt that nose's aquiline,
And let, although compressed, a point of pulp appear
I' the mouth,—would give at last the portrait of Elvire?

L.

Well, and if so succeed hand-practice on awry
Preposterous art-mistake, shall soul-proficiency
Despair,—when exercised on nature, which at worst
Always implies success, however crossed and curst
By failure,—such as art would emulate in vain?
Shall any soul despair of setting free again
Trait after trait, until the type as wholly start
Forth, visible to sense, as that minutest part,
(Whate'er the chance) which first arresting eye, warned soul
That, under wrong enough and ravage, lay the whole
O' the loveliness it "loved"—I take the accepted phrase?

LI.

So I account for tastes: each chooses, none gainsays
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,
A hell for all beside. You can but crown the brim
O' the cup; if it be full, what matters less or more?
Let each, i' the world, amend his love, as I, o' the shore
My sketch, and the result as undisputed be!
Their handiwork to them, and my Elvire to me:
—Result more beautiful than beauty's self, when lo,
What was my Rafael turns my Michelagnolo!

LII.

For, we two boast, beside our pearl, a diamond.
I' the palace-gallery, the corridor beyond,
Upheaves itself a marble, a magnitude man-shaped
As snow might be. One hand,—the Master's,—smoothed and scraped
That mass, he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled
Life out of death, and left a challenge: for the world,
Death still,—since who shall dare, close to the image, say
If this be purposed Art, or mere mimetic play
Of Nature?—wont to deal with crag or cloud, as stuff
To fashion novel forms, like forms we know, enough
For recognition, but enough unlike the same,
To leave no hope ourselves may profit by her game;
Death therefore to the world. Step back a pace or two!
And then, who dares dispute the gradual birth its due
Of breathing life, or breathless immortality,
Where out she stands, and yet stops short, half bold, half shy,
Hesitates on the threshold of things, since partly blent
With stuff she needs must quit, her native element
I' the mind o' the Master,—what's the creature, dear-divine
Yet earthly-awful too, so manly-feminine,
Pretends this white advance? What startling brain-escape
Of Michelagnolo takes elemental shape?
I think he meant the daughter of the old man o' the sea,
Emerging from her wave, goddess Eidotheé—
She who, in elvish sport, spite with benevolence
Mixed Mab-wise up, must needs instruct the Hero whence
Salvation dawns o'er that mad misery of his isle.
Yes, she imparts to him, by what a pranksome wile

He may surprise her sire, asleep beneath a rock,
When he has told their tale, amid his web-foot flock
Of sea-beasts, "fine fat seals with bitter breath!" laughs she
At whom she likes to save, no less: Eidotheé,
Whom you shall never face evolved, in earth, in air,
In wave; but, manifest i' the soul's domain, why, there
She ravishingly moves to meet you, all through aid
O' the soul! Bid shine what should, dismiss into the shade
What should not be,—and there triumphs the paramount
Emprise o' the Master! But, attempt to make account
Of what the sense, without soul's help, perceives? I bought
That work—(despite plain proof, whose hand it was had wrought
I' the rough: I think we trace the tool of triple tooth,
Here, there and everywhere)—bought dearly that uncouth
Unwieldy bulk, for just ten dollars—"Bulk, would fetch—
Converted into lime—some five pauls!" grinned a wretch,
Who, bound on business, paused to hear the bargaining,
And would have pitied me "but for the fun o' the thing!"

LIII.

Shall such a wretch be—you? Must—while I show Elvire
Shaming all other forms, seen as I see her here
I' the soul,—this other-you perversely look outside,
And ask me, "Where i' the world is charm to be descried
I' the tall thin personage, with paled eye, pensive face,
Any amount of love, and some remains of grace?"
See yourself in my soul!

LIV.

And what a world for each
Must somehow be i' the soul,—accept that mode of speech,—
Whether an aura gird the soul, wherein it seems
To float and move, a belt of all the glints and gleams
It struck from out that world, its weaklier fellows found
So dead and cold; or whether these not so much surround,
As pass into the soul itself, add worth to worth,
As wine enriches blood, and straightway send it forth,
Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity,
That's battle without end.

LV.

I search but cannot see
What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it tries
Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories
Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own
For ever, by some mode whereby shall be made known
The gain of every life. Death reads the title clear—
What each soul for itself conquered from out things here:
Since, in the seeing soul, all worth lies, I assert,—
And nought i' the world, which, save for soul that sees, inert
Was, is, and would be ever,—stuff for transmuting,—null
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful—
But, touched aright, prompt yields each particle its tongue
Of elemental flame,—no matter whence flame sprung
From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,
So long as soul has power to make them burn, express

What lights and warms henceforth, leaves only ash behind,
Howe'er the chance: if soul be privileged to find
Food so soon that, by first snatch of eye, suck of breath,
It can absorb pure life: or, rather, meeting death
I' the shape of ugliness, by fortunate recoil
So put on its resource, it find therein a foil
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response
To ugliness and death,—creation for the nonce.

LVI.

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,
Through evocation out of that which, on the whole,
Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment, at best,
And—what, at worst, save failure to spit at and detest?—
—Through transference of all, achieved in visible things,
To where, secured from wrong, rest soul's imaginings—
Through ardour to bring help just where completion halts,
Do justice to the purpose, ignore the slips and faults—
And, last, through waging with deformity a fight
Which wrings thence, at the end, precise its opposite.
I praise the loyalty o' the scholar,—stung by taunt
Of fools "Does this evince thy Master men so vaunt?
Did he then perpetrate the plain abortion here?"
Who cries "His work am I! full fraught by him, I clear
His fame from each result of accident and time,
Myself restore his work to its fresh morning-prime,
Not daring touch the mass of marble, fools deride,
But putting my idea in plaster by its side,
His, since mine; I, he made, vindicate who made me!"

LVII.

For, you must know, I too achieved Eidotheé,
In silence and by night—dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul, although, to sense, that triple-tine's
Achievement halt half-way, break down, or leave a blank.
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank!
Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes—
That one at least was left who, born to recognize
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked, that night,
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more?
And then,—for at one blow, its fragments strewed the floor,—
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore.

LVIII.

And, even as I hold and have Eidotheé,
I say, I cannot think that gain,—which would not be
Except a special soul had gained it,—that such gain
Can ever be estranged, do aught but appertain
Immortally, by right firm, indefeasible,
To who performed the feat, through God's grace and man's will!
Gain, never shared by those who practised with earth's stuff,
And spoiled whate'er they touched, leaving its roughness rough,
Its blankness bare, and, when the ugliness opposed,
Either struck work or laughed "He doted or he dozed!"

LIX.

While, oh, how all the more will love become intense
Hereafter, when "to love" means yearning to dispense,
Each soul, its own amount of gain through its own mode
Of practising with life, upon some soul which owed
Its treasure, all diverse and yet in worth the same,
To new work and changed way! Things furnish you rose-flame,
Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow more than needs,
For me, I nowise doubt; why doubt a time succeeds
When each one may impart, and each receive, both share
The chemic secret, learn,—where I lit force, why there
You drew forth lambent pity,—where I found only food
For self-indulgence, you still blew a spark at brood
I' the greyest ember, stopped not till self-sacrifice imbued
Heaven's face with flame? What joy, when each may supplement
The other, changing each as changed, till, wholly blent,
Our old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white!
Exemplifying law, apparent even now
In the eternal progress,—love's law, which I avow
And thus would formulate: each soul lives, longs and works
For itself, by itself,—because a lodestar lurks,
An other than itself,—in whatsoe'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich
May grasp the Gulliver: or it, or he, or she—
Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene,[1]—

[1] See "Prometheus Bound" of Æschylus.

(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it fixed!
So soft it says,—"God, man, or both together mixed"!)
This, guessed at through the flesh, by parts which prove the whole,
This constitutes the soul discernible by soul
—Elvire, by me!

LX.

"And then"—(pray you, permit remain
This hand upon my arm!—your cheek dried, if you deign,
Choosing my shoulder)—"then"—(Stand up for, boldly state
The objection in its length and breadth!) "you abdicate,
With boast yet on your lip, soul's empire, and accept
The rule of sense; the Man, from monarch's throne has stept—
Leapt, rather, at one bound, to base, and there lies, Brute.
You talk of soul,—how soul, in search of soul to suit,
Must needs review the sex, the army, rank and file
Of womankind, report no face nor form so vile
But that a certain worth, by certain signs, may thence
Evolve itself and stand confessed—to soul—by sense.
Sense? Oh, the loyal bee endeavours for the hive!
Disinterested hunts the flower-field through, alive
Not one mean moment, no,—suppose on flower he light,—
To his peculiar drop, petal-dew perquisite,
Matter-of-course snatched snack: unless he taste, how try?
This, light on tongue-tip laid, allows him pack his thigh,
Transport all he counts prize, provision for the comb,
Food for the future day,—a banquet, but at home!

Soul? Ere you reach Fifine's, some flesh may be to pass!
That bombéd brow, that eye, a kindling chrysopras,
Beneath its stiff black lash, inquisitive how speeds
Each functionary limb, how play of foot succeeds,
And how you let escape or duly sympathize
With gastroknemian[1] grace,—true, your soul tastes and tries,
And trifles time with these, but, fear not, will arrive
At essence in the core, bring honey home to hive,
Brain-stock and heart-stuff both—to strike objectors dumb—
Since only soul affords the soul fit pabulum!
Be frank for charity! Who is it you deceive—
Yourself or me or God, with all this make-believe?"

LXI.

And frank I will respond as you interrogate.
Ah, Music, wouldst thou help! Words struggle with the weight
So feebly of the False, thick element between
Our soul, the True, and Truth! which, but that intervene
False shows of things, were reached as easily by thought
Reducible to word, as now by yearnings wrought
Up with thy fine free force, oh Music, that canst thrid,
Electrically win a passage through the lid
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,
Hardly transpierce as thou! Not dissipate, thou deign'st,
So much as tricksily elude what words attempt
To heave away, i' the mass, and let the soul, exempt
From all that vapoury obstruction, view, instead
Of glimmer underneath, a glory overhead.

[1] Pertaining to the calf of the leg.

Not feebly, like our phrase, against the barrier go
In suspirative swell the authentic notes I know,
By help whereof, I would our souls were found without
The pale, above the dense and dim which breeds the doubt!
But Music, dumb for you, withdraws her help from me;
And, since to weary words recourse again must be,
At least permit they rest their burthen here and there,
Music-like: cover space! My answer,—need you care
If it exceed the bounds, reply to questioning
You never meant should plague? Once fairly on the wing,
Let me flap far and wide!

LXII.

For this is just the time,
The place, the mood in you and me, when all things chime.
Clash forth life's common chord, whence, list how there ascend
Harmonics far and faint, till our perception end,—
Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale
Embracing what we know and feel and are! How fail
To find or, better, lose your question, in this quick
Reply which nature yields, ample and catholic?
For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you see,
The village-precinct; sun sets mild on Sainte Marie—
We only catch the spire, and yet I seem to know
What's hid i' the turn o' the hill: how all the graves must glow
Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss

Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow crisp
bead-blooms
Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, mid the tombs,
With prattle good as song, amuse the dead awhile,
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile!

LXIII.

Bid them good-bye before last friend has sung and supped!
Because we pick our path and need our eyes,—abrupt
Descent enough,—but here's the beach, and there's the bay,
And, opposite, the streak of Île Noirmoutier.
Thither the waters tend; they freshen as they haste,
At feel o' the night-wind, though, by cliff and cliff embraced,
This breadth of blue retains its self-possession still;
As you and I intend to do, who take our fill
Of sights and sounds—soft sound, the countless hum and skip
Of insects we disturb, and that good fellowship
Of rabbits our foot-fall sends huddling, each to hide
He best knows how and where; and what whirred past, wings wide?
That was an owl, their young may justlier apprehend!
Though you refuse to speak, your beating heart, my friend,
I feel against my arm,—though your bent head forbids
A look into your eyes, yet, on my cheek, their lids
That ope and shut, soft send a silken thrill the same.
Well, out of all and each these nothings, comes—what came
Often enough before, the something that would aim
Once more at the old mark: the impulse to at last
Succeed where hitherto was failure in the past,
And yet again essay the adventure. Clearlier sings
No bird to its couched corpse "Into the truth of things—
Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou, and remain!"

LXIV.

"That rise into the true out of the false —explain?"
May an example serve? In yonder bay I bathed,
This sunny morning: swam my best, then hung, half swathed
With chill, and half with warmth, i' the channel's midmost deep:
You know how one—not treads, but stands in water? Keep
Body and limbs below, hold head back, uplift chin,
And, for the rest, leave care! If brow, eyes, mouth, should win
Their freedom,—excellent! If they must brook the surge,
No matter though they sink, let but the nose emerge.
So, all of me in brine lay soaking: did I care
One jot? I kept alive by man's due breath of air
I' the nostrils, high and dry. At times, o'er these would run
The ripple, even wash the wavelet,—morning's sun
Tempted advance, no doubt: and always flash of froth,
Fish-outbreak, bubbling by, would find me nothing loth
To rise and look around; then all was overswept
With dark and death at once. But trust the old adept!
Back went again the head, a merest motion made,
Fin-fashion, either hand, and nostril soon conveyed
Assurance light and life were still in reach as erst:
Always the last and,—wait and watch,—sometimes the first.

Try to ascend breast-high? wave arms wide
free of tether?
Be in the air and leave the water altogether?
Under went all again, till I resigned myself
To only breathe the air, that's footed by an
elf,
And only swim the water, that's native to a fish.
But there is no denying that, ere I curbed
my wish,
And schooled my restive arms, salt entered
mouth and eyes
Often enough—sun, sky, and air so tantalize!
Still, the adept swims, this accorded, that
denied;
Can always breathe, sometimes see and be
satisfied!

LXV.

I liken to this play o' the body,—fruitless
strife
To slip the sea and hold the heaven,—my
spirit's life
'Twixt false, whence it would break, and true,
where it would bide.
I move in, yet resist, am upborne every side
By what I beat against, an element too gross
To live in, did not soul duly obtain her
dose
Of life-breath, and inhale from truth's pure
plenitude
Above her, snatch and gain enough to just
illude
With hope that some brave bound may baffle
evermore
The obstructing medium, make who swam
henceforward soar:
—Gain scarcely snatched when, foiled by the
very effort, sowse,
Underneath ducks the soul, her truthward
yearnings dowse
Deeper in falsehood! ay, but fitted less and less
To bear in nose and mouth old briny bitterness
Proved alien more and more: since each ex-
perience proves
Air—the essential good, not sea, wherein who
moves
Must thence, in the act, escape, apart from
will or wish.
Move a mere hand to take waterweed, jelly-fish,
Upward you tend! And yet our business with
the sea
Is not with air, but just o' the water, watery:
We must endure the false, no particle of which
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a
pitch
Above it, find our head reach truth, while
hands explore
The false below: so much while here we
bathe,—no more!

LXVI.

Now, there is one prime point (hear and be
edified!)
One truth more true for me than any truth
beside—
To-wit, that I am I, who have the power to
swim,
The skill to understand the law whereby each
limb
May bear to keep immersed, since, in return,
made sure
That its mere movement lifts head clean
through coverture.
By practice with the false, I reach the true?
Why, thence
It follows, that the more I gain self-confidence,
Get proof I know the trick, can float, sink,
rise, at will,
The better I submit to what I have the skill
To conquer in my turn, even now, and by
and by
Leave wholly for the land, and there laugh,
shake me dry
To last drop, saturate with noonday—no need
more
Of wet and fret, plagued once: on Pornic's
placid shore,
Abundant air to breathe, sufficient sun to feel!
Meantime I buoy myself: no whit my senses
reel
When over me there breaks a billow; nor,
elate
Too much by some brief taste, I quaff in-
temperate
The air, o'ertop breast-high the wave-environ-
ment.
Full well I know the thing I grasp, as if intent

To hold,—my wandering wave,—will not be grasped at all:
The solid-seeming grasped, the handful great or small
Must go to nothing, glide through fingers fast enough;
But none the less, to treat liquidity as stuff—
Though failure—certainly succeeds beyond its aim,
Sends head above, past thing that hands miss, all the same.

LXVII.

So with this wash o' the world, wherein life-long we drift;
We push and paddle through the foam by making shift
To breathe above at whiles when, after deepest duck
Down underneath the show, we put forth hand and pluck
At what seems somehow like reality—a soul.
I catch at this and that, to capture and control,
Presume I hold a prize, discover that my pains
Are run to nought: my hands are baulked, my head regains
The surface where I breathe and look about, a space.
The soul that helped me mount? Swallowed up in the race
O' the tide, come who knows whence, gone gaily who knows where!
I thought the prize was mine; I flattered myself there.
It did its duty, though: I felt it, it felt me,
Or, where I look about and breathe, I should not be.
The main point is—the false fluidity was bound
Acknowledge that it frothed o'er substance, nowise found
Fluid, but firm and true. Man, outcast, "howls,"—at rods?—
If "sent in playful spray a-shivering to his gods!"
Childishest childe, man makes thereby no bad exchange.
Stay with the flat-fish, thou! We like the upper range
Where the "gods" live, perchance the dæmons also dwell:
Where operates a Power, which every throb and swell
Of human heart invites that human soul approach,
"Sent" near and nearer still, however "spray" encroach
On "shivering" flesh below, to altitudes, which gained,
Evil proves good, wrong right, obscurity explained,
And "howling" childishness. Whose howl have we to thank,
If all the dogs 'gan bark and puppies whine, till sank
Each yelper's tail 'twixt legs? for Huntsman Common-sense
Came to the rescue, bade prompt thwack of thong dispense
Quiet i' the kennel; taught that ocean might be blue,
And rolling and much more, and yet the soul have, too,
Its touch of God's own flame, which He may so expand
"Who measurèd the waters i' the hollow of His hand"
That ocean's self shall dry, turn dew-drop in respect
Of all-triumphant fire, matter with intellect
Once fairly matched; bade him who egged on hounds to bay,
Go curse, i' the poultry yard, his kind: "there let him lay"[1]
The swan's one addled egg: which yet shall put to use,
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose!

LXVIII.

No, I want sky not sea, prefer the larks to shrimps,
And never dive so deep but that I get a glimpse
O' the blue above, a breath of the air around.
Elvire,

[1] Compare "Childe Harold," verse clxxx.

I seize—by catching at the melted beryl here,
The tawny hair that just has trickled off,—
Fifine!
Did not we two trip forth to just enjoy the scene,
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage—
Dabble, and there an end, with foam and froth o'er face,
Till suddenly Fifine suggested change of place?
Now we taste æther, scorn the wave, and interchange apace
No ordinary thoughts, but such as evidence
The cultivated mind in both. On what pretence
Are you and I to sneer at who lent help to hand,
And gave the lucky lift?

LXIX.

Still sour? I understand!
One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan—
That Woman does the work: I waive the help of Man.
"Why should experiment be tried with only waves,
When solid spars float round? Still some Thalassia saves
Too pertinaciously, as though no Triton, bluff
As e'er blew brine from conch, were free to help enough!
Surely, to recognize a man, his mates serve best!
Why is there not the same or greater interest
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray,
Were recognition just your object, as you say,
Amid this element o' the false?"

LXX.

We come to terms.
I need to be proved true; and nothing so confirms
One's faith in the prime point that one's alive, not dead,
In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read,
As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend
His passage: "You that breathe, along with us the ghosts?"
Here, why must it be still a woman that accosts?

LXXI.

Because, one woman's worth, in that respect, such hairy hosts
Of the other sex and sort! Men? Say you have the power
To make them yours, rule men, throughout life's little hour,
According to the phrase; what follows? Men, you make,
By ruling them, your own: each man for his own sake
Accepts you as his guide, avails him of what worth
He apprehends in you to sublimate his earth
With fire: content, if so you convoy him through night,
That you shall play the sun, and he, the satellite,
Pilfer your light and heat and virtue, starry pelf,
While, caught up by your course, he turns upon himself.
Women rush into you, and there remain absorbed.
Beside, 'tis only men completely formed, full-orbed,
Are fit to follow track, keep pace, illustrate so
The leader: any sort of woman may bestow
Her atom on the star, or clod she counts for such,—
Each little making less bigger by just that much.
Women grow you, while men depend on you at best.
And what dependence! Bring and put him to the test,
Your specimen disciple, a handbreadth separate
From you, he almost seemed to touch before! Abate

Complacency you will, I judge, at what's
divulged !
Some flabbiness you fixed, some vacancy
outbulged,
Some—much—nay, all, perhaps, the outward
man's your work :
But, inside man?—find him, wherever he
may lurk,
And where's a touch of you in his true self?

LXXII.

I wish
Some wind would waft this way a glassy
bubble-fish
O' the kind the sea inflates, and show you,
once detached
From wave . . . or no, the event is better
told than watched :
Still may the thing float free, globose and
opaline
All over, save where just the amethysts com-
bine
To blue their best, rim-round the sea-flower
with a tinge
Earth's violet never knew ! Well, 'neath that
gem-tipped fringe,
A head lurks—of a kind—that acts as stomach
too ;
Then comes the emptiness which out the
water blew
So big and belly-like, but, dry of water
drained,
Withers away nine-tenths. Ah, but a tenth
remained !
That was the creature's self: no more akin
to sea,
Poor rudimental head and stomach, you agree,
Than sea's akin to sun who yonder dips his
edge.

LXXIII.

But take the rill which ends a race o'er
yonder ledge
O' the fissured cliff, to find its fate in smoke
below !
Disengage that, and ask—what news of life,
you know
It led, that long lone way, through pasture,
plain and waste?
All's gone to give the sea ! no touch of earth,
no taste
Of air, reserved to tell how rushes used to bring
The butterfly and bee, and fisher-bird that's
king
O' the purple kind, about the snow-soft silver-
sweet
Infant of mist and dew ; only these atoms
fleet,
Embittered evermore, to make the sea one drop
More big thereby — if thought keep count
where sense must stop.

LXXIV.

The full-blown ingrate, mere recipient of
the brine,
That takes all and gives nought, is Man ; the
feminine
Rillet that, taking all and giving nought in turn,
Goes headlong to her death i' the sea, without
concern
For the old inland life, snow-soft and silver-
clear,
That's woman — typified from Fifine to
Elvire.

LXXV.

Then, how diverse the modes prescribed to
who would deal
With either kind of creature ! 'Tis Man, you
seek to seal
Your very own? Resolve, for first step, to
discard
Nine-tenths of what you are ! To make,
you must be marred,—
To raise your race, must stoop,—to teach
them aught, must learn
Ignorance, meet half-way what most you
hope to spurn
I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate
the thought
And vulgarize the word, and see the deed be
brought
To look like nothing done with any such intent
As teach men—though perchance it teach,
by accident !
So may you master men : assured that if you
show
One point of mastery, departure from the low

And level,—head or heart-revolt at long disguise,
Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities,—
If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word
Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,
His chance of capture's gone. Success means, they may snuff,
Examine, and report,—a brother, sure enough,
Disports him in brute-guise; for skin is truly skin,
Horns, hoofs are hoofs and horns, and all, outside and in,
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beasts resigned
May follow, made a prize in honest pride, behind
One of themselves and not creation's upstart lord!
Well, there's your prize i' the pound—much joy may it afford
My Indian! Make survey and tell me,—was it worth
You acted part so well, went all-fours upon earth
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to pass
That stags should deign eat hay when winter stints them grass?

LXXVI.

So much for men, and how disguise may make them mind
Their master. But you have to deal with womankind?
Abandon stratagem for strategy! Cast quite
The vile disguise away, try truth clean-opposite
Such creep-and-crawl, stand forth all man and, might it chance,
Somewhat of angel too!—whate'er inheritance,
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,
Lay claim to! Your best self revealed at uttermost,—
That's the wise way o' the strong! And e'en should falsehood tempt
The weaker sort to swerve,—at least the lie's exempt
From slur, that's loathlier still, of aiming to debase
Rather than elevate its object. Mimic grace,
Not make deformity your mask! Be sick by stealth,
Nor traffic with disease—malingering in health!
No more of: "Countrymen, I boast me one like you—
My lot, the common strength, the common weakness too!
I think the thoughts you think; and if I have the knack
Of fitting thoughts to words, you peradventure lack,
Envy me not the chance, yourselves more fortunate!
Many the loaded ship self-sunk through treasure-freight,
Many the pregnant brain brought never child to birth,
Many the great heart broke beneath its girdle-girth!
Be mine the privilege to supplement defect,
Give dumbness voice, and let the labouring intellect
Find utterance in word, or possibly in deed!
What though I seem to go before? 'tis you that lead!
I follow what I see so plain—the general mind
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,
Which dwarfs the unit—me—to insignificance!
Halt you, I stop forthwith,—proceed, I too advance!"

LXXVII.

Ay, that's the way to take with men you wish to lead,
Instruct and benefit. Small prospect you succeed
With women so! Be all that's great and good and wise,
August, sublime—swell out your frog the right ox-size—
He's buoyed like a balloon, to soar, not burst, you'll see!
The more you prove yourself, less fear the prize will flee

The captor. Here you start after no pompous stag
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag
Of bray, and ramp of hoof; you have not to subdue
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you!
'Tis rather with . . .

LXXVIII.

Ah, thanks! quick—where the dipping disk
Shows red against the rise and fall o' the fin! there frisk
In shoal the—porpoises? Dolphins, they shall and must
Cut through the freshening clear—dolphins, my instance just!
'Tis fable, therefore truth: who has to do with these,
Needs never practise trick of going hands and knees
As beasts require. Art fain the fish to captivate?
Gather thy greatness round, Arion! Stand in state,
As when the banqueting thrilled conscious—like a rose
Throughout its hundred leaves at that approach it knows
Of music in the bird—while Corinth grew one breast
A-throb for song and thee; nay, Periander[1] pressed
The Methymnæan[2] hand, and felt a king indeed, and guessed
How Phœbus' self might give that great mouth of the gods
Such a magnificence of song! The pillar nods,
Rocks roof, and trembles door, gigantic, post and jamb,
As harp and voice rend air—the shattering dithyramb![3]

So stand thou, and assume the robe that tingles yet
With triumph; strike the harp, whose every golden fret
Still smoulders with the flame, was late at fingers' end—
So, standing on the bench o' the ship, let voice expend
Thy soul, sing, unalloyed by meaner mode, thine own,
The Orthian lay; then leap from music's lofty throne,
Into the lowest surge, make fearlessly thy launch!
Whatever storm may threat, some dolphin will be staunch!
Whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea-thing
Will surely rise to save, will bear—palpitating—
One proud humility of love beneath its load—
Stem tide, part wave, till both roll on, thy jewell'd road
Of triumph, and the grim o' the gulph grow wonder-white
I' the phosphorescent wake; and still the exquisite
Sea-thing stems on, saves still, palpitatingly thus,
Lands safe at length its load of love at Tænarus,[4]
True woman-creature!

LXXIX.

Man? Ah, would you prove what power
Marks man,—what fruit his tree may yield, beyond the sour
And stinted crab, he calls love-apple, which remains
After you toil and moil your utmost,—all, love gains
By lavishing manure?—try quite the other plan!
And, to obtain the strong true product of a man,

[1] Tyrant of Corinth.
[2] Arion was born at Methymna, in Lesbos.
[3] Lyrical chorus.
[4] The spot whither the dolphin carried Arion on his way to Corinth.

Set him to hate a little! Leave cherishing
his root,
And rather prune his branch, nip off the
pettiest shoot
Superfluous on his bough! I promise, you
shall learn
By what grace came the goat, of all beasts
else, to earn
Such favour with the god o' the grape: 'twas
only he
Who, browsing on its tops, first stung fertility
Into the stock's heart, stayed much growth
of tendril-twine,
Some faintish flower, perhaps, but gained the
indignant wine,
Wrath of the red press! Catch the puniest
of the kind—
Man-animalcule, starved body, stunted mind,
And, as you nip the blotch 'twixt thumb and
finger-nail,
Admire how heaven above and earth below
avail
No jot to soothe the mite, sore at God's prime
offence
In making mites at all,—coax from its im-
potence
One virile drop of thought, or word, or deed,
by strain
To propagate for once—which nature rendered
vain,
Who lets first failure stay, yet cares not to record
Mistake that seems to cast opprobrium on
the Lord!
Such were the gain from love's best pains!
But let the elf
Be touched with hate, because some real man
bears himself
Manlike in body and soul, and, since he lives,
must thwart
And furify and set a-fizz this counterpart
O' the pismire that's surprised to effervescence,
if,
By chance, black bottle come in contact with
chalk cliff,
Acid with alkali! Then thrice the bulk,
out blows
Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits
some rose!

LXXX.

No—'tis ungainly work, the ruling men, at
best!
The graceful instinct's right: 'tis women stand
confessed
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
Takes nothing and gives all: Elvire, Fifine,
'tis they
Convince,—if little, much, no matter!—one
degree
The more, at least, convince unreasonable
me
That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else
seem
And be not: if I dream, at least I know I
dream.
The falsity, beside, is fleeting: I can stand
Still, and let truth come back,—your steady-
ing touch of hand
Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid
All on the move. Believe in me, at once
you bid
Myself believe that, since one soul has dis-
engaged
Mine from the shows of things, so much is
fact: I waged
No foolish warfare, then, with shades, myself
a shade,
Here in the world—may hope my pains will
be repaid!
How false things are, I judge: how change-
able, I learn
When, where and how it is I shall see truth
return,
That I expect to know, because Fifine knows
me!—
How much more, if Elvire!

LXXXI.

"And why not, only she?
Since there can be for each, one Best, no
more, such Best,
For body and mind of him, abolishes the rest
O' the simply Good and Better. You please
select Elvire
To give you this belief in truth, dispel the
fear

Yourself are, after all, as false as what surrounds;
And why not be content? When we two watched the rounds
The boatman made, 'twixt shoal and sandbank, yesterday,
As, at dead slack of tide, he chose to push his way,
With oar and pole, across the creek, and reach the isle
After a world of pains—my word provoked your smile,
Yet none the less deserved reply: "'Twere wiser wait
'The turn o' the tide, and find conveyance for his freight—
'How easily—within the ship to purpose moored,
'Managed by sails, not oars! But no,—the man's allured
'By liking for the new and hard in his exploit!
'First come shall serve! He makes,—courageous and adroit,—
'The merest willow-leaf of boat do duty, bear
'His merchandise across: once over, needs he care
'If folk arrive by ship, six hours hence, fresh and gay?'
No: he scorns commonplace, affects the unusual way;
And good Elvire is moored, with not a breath to flap
The yards of her, no lift of ripple to o'erlap
Keel, much less, prow. What care? since here's a cockle-shell,
Fifine, that's taut and crank, and carries just as well
Such seamanship as yours!"

LXXXII.

Alack, our life is lent,
From first to last, the whole, for this experiment
Of proving what I say—that we ourselves are true!
I would there were one voyage, and then no more to do
But tread the firmland, tempt the uncertain sea no more.
I would we might dispense with change of shore for shore
To evidence our skill, demonstrate—in no dream
It was, we tided o'er the trouble of the stream.
I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip,—
Elvire, and not Fifine,—might test our seamanship.
But why expend one's breath to tell you, change of boat
Means change of tactics too? Come see the same afloat
To-morrow, all the change, new stowage fore and aft
O' the cargo; then, to cross requires new sailor-craft!
To-day, one step from stern to bow keeps boat in trim:
To-morrow, some big stone,—or woe to boat and him!—
Must ballast both. That man stands for Mind, paramount
Throughout the adventure: ay, howe'er you make account,
'Tis mind that navigates,—skips over, twists between
The bales i' the boat,—now gives importance to the mean,
And now abates the pride of life, accepts all fact,
Discards all fiction,—steers Fifine, and cries, i' the act,
"Thou art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown!
Wouldst tell no end of lies: I talk to smile or frown!
Wouldst rob me: do men blame a squirrel, lithe and sly,
For pilfering the nut she adds to hoard? Nor I.
Elvire is true, as truth, honesty's self, alack!
The worse! too safe the ship, the transport there and back
Too certain! one may loll and lounge and leave the helm,
Let wind and tide do work: no fear that waves o'erwhelm

The steady-going bark, as sure to feel her way
Blindfold across, reach land, next year as yesterday!
How can I but suspect, the true feat were to slip
Down side, transfer myself to cockle-shell from ship,
And try if, trusting to sea-tracklessness, I class
With those around whose breast grew oak and triple brass:
Who dreaded no degree of death, but, with dry eyes,
Surveyed the turgid main and its monstrosities—
And rendered futile so, the prudent Power's decree
Of separate earth and disassociating sea;
Since, how is it observed, if impious vessels leap
Across, and tempt a thing they should not touch—the deep?
(See Horace to the boat, wherein, for Athens bound,
When Virgil must embark—Jove keep him safe and sound!—
The poet bade his friend start on the watery road,
Much re-assured by this so comfortable ode.)

LXXXIII.

Then, never grudge my poor Fifine her compliment!
The rakish craft could slip her moorings in the tent,
And, hoisting every stitch of spangled canvas, steer
Through divers rocks and shoals,—in fine, deposit here
Your Virgil of a spouse, in Attica: yea, thrid
The mob of men, select the special virtue hid
In him, forsooth, and say—or rather, smile so sweet,
"Of all the multitude, you—I prefer to cheat!
Are you for Athens bound? I can perform the trip,
Shove little pinnace off, while yon superior ship,
The Elvire, refits in port!" So, off we push from beach
Of Pornic town, and lo, ere eye can wink, we reach
The Long Walls, and I prove that Athens is no dream,
For there the temples rise! they are, they nowise seem!
Earth is not all one lie, this truth attests me true!
Thanks therefore to Fifine! Elvire, I'm back with you!
Share in the memories! Embark I trust we shall
Together some fine day, and so, for good and all,
Bid Pornic Town adieu,—then, just the strait to cross,
And we reach harbour, safe, in Iostephanos!

LXXXIV.

How quickly night comes! Lo, already 'tis the land
Turns sea-like; overcrept by grey, the plains expand,
Assume significance; while ocean dwindles, shrinks
Into a pettier bound: its plash and plaint, methinks,
Six steps away, how both retire, as if their part
Were played, another force were free to prove her art,
Protagonist in turn! Are you unterrified?
All false, all fleeting too! And nowhere things abide,
And everywhere we strain that things should stay,—the one
Truth, that ourselves are true!

LXXXV.

A word, and I have done.
Is it not just our hate of falsehood, fleetingness,
And the mere part, things play, that constitutes express
The inmost charm of this Fifine and all her tribe?
Actors! We also act, but only they inscribe

Their style and title so, and preface, only they,
Performance with "A lie is all we do or say."
Wherein but there can be the attraction, Falsehood's bribe,
That wins so surely o'er to Fifine and her tribe
The liking, nay the love of who hate Falsehood most,
Except that these alone of mankind make their boast
"Frankly, we simulate!" To feign, means —to have grace
And so get gratitude! This ruler of the race,
Crowned, sceptred, stoled to suit,—'tis not that you detect
The cobbler in the king, but that he makes effect
By seeming the reverse of what you know to be
The man, the mind, whole form, fashion and quality.
Mistake his false for true, one minute,—there's an end
Of the admiration! Truth, we grieve at or rejoice:
'Tis only falsehood, plain in gesture, look and voice,
That brings the praise desired, since profit comes thereby.
The histrionic truth is in the natural lie.
Because the man who wept the tears was, all the time,
Happy enough; because the other man, a-grime
With guilt, was, at the least, as white as I and you;
Because the timid type of bashful maidhood, who
Starts at her own pure shade, already numbers seven
Born babes and, in a month, will turn their odd to even;
Because the saucy prince would prove, could you unfurl
Some yards of wrap, a meek and meritorious girl—
Precisely as you see success attained by each
O' the mimes, do you approve, not foolishly impeach
The falsehood!

LXXXVI.

That's the first o' the truths found: all things, slow
Or quick i' the passage, come at last to that, you know!
Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced
To issue from within: truth, falsehood, are divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment. Life means—learning to abhor
The false, and love the true, truth treasured snatch by snatch,
Waifs counted at their worth. And when with strays they match
I' the parti-coloured world,—when, under foul, shines fair,
And truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere
I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,
And no obstruction more affects this confidence,—
When faith is ripe for sight,—why, reasonably, then
Comes the great clearing-up. Wait threescore years and ten!

LXXXVII.

Therefore I prize stage-play, the honest cheating; thence
The impulse pricked, when fife and drum bade Fair commence,
To bid you trip and skip, link arm in arm with me,
Like husband and like wife, and so together see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

And if I started thence upon abstruser themes . . .
Well, 'twas a dream, pricked too!

LXXXVIII.

A poet never dreams:
We prose-folk always do: we miss the proper duct
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct
The system, therefore; mind, sound in a body sane,
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,
And leaves the rest alone. What ghosts do poets see?
What dæmons fear? what man or thing misapprehend?
Unchoked, the channel's flush, the fancy's free to spend
Its special self aright in manner, time and place.
Never believe that who create the busy race
O' the brain, bring poetry to birth, such act performed,
Feel trouble them, the same, such residue as warmed
My prosy blood, this morn,—intrusive fancies, meant
For outbreak and escape by quite another vent!
Whence follows that, asleep, my dreamings oft exceed
The bound. But you shall hear.

LXXXIX.

I smoked. The webs o' the weed,
With many a break i' the mesh, were floating to re-form
Cupola-wise above: chased thither by soft warm
Inflow of air without; since I—of mind to muse, to clench
The gain of soul and body, got by their noon-day drench
In sun and sea,—had flung both frames o' the window wide,
To soak my body still and let soul soar beside.
In came the country sounds and sights and smells—that fine
Sharp needle in the nose from our fermenting wine!
In came a dragon-fly with whir and stir, then out,
Off and away: in came,—kept coming, rather,—pout
Succeeding smile, and take-away still close on give,—
One loose long creeper-branch, tremblingly sensitive
To risks which blooms and leaves,—each leaf tongue-broad, each bloom
Mid-finger-deep,—must run by prying in the room
Of one who loves and grasps and spoils and speculates.
All so far plain enough to sight and sense: but, weights,
Measures and numbers,—ah, could one apply such test
To other visitants that came at no request
Of who kept open house,—to fancies manifold
From this four-cornered world, the memories new and old,
The antenatal prime experience—what know I?—
The initiatory love preparing us to die—
Such were a crowd to count, a sight to see, a prize
To turn to profit, were but fleshly ears and eyes
Able to cope with those o' the spirit!

XC.

Therefore,—since
Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music,—mine, o'erburthened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burthen to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead

Of words, sought sounds, and saved for ever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose,—nay, puts poetry to shame.
I read the note, I strike the key, I bid *record*
The instrument—thanks greet the veritable word!
And not in vain I urge: "O dead and gone away,
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength become my stay,
Thy record serve as well to register—I felt
And knew thus much of truth! With me, must knowledge melt
Into surmise and doubt and disbelief, unless
Thy music reassure—I gave no idle guess,
But gained a certitude I yet may hardly keep!
What care? since round is piled a monumental heap
Of music that conserves the assurance, thou as well
Wast certain of the same! thou, master of the spell,
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men
Feel only to forget!" Who was it helped me, then?
What master's work first came responsive to my call,
Found my eye, fixed my choice?

XCI.

Why, Schumann's "Carnival!"
My choice chimed in, you see, exactly with the sounds
And sights of yestereve when, going on my rounds,
Where both roads join the bridge, I heard across the dusk
Creak a slow caravan, and saw arrive the husk
O' the spice-nut, which peeled off this morning, and displayed,
'Twixt tree and tree, a tent whence the red pennon made
Its vivid reach for home and ocean-idleness—
And where, my heart surmised, at that same moment,—yes,—
Tugging her *tricot* on,—yet tenderly, lest stitch
Announce the crack of doom, reveal disaster which
Our Pornic's modest stock of merceries in vain
Were ransacked to retrieve,—there, cautiously a-strain,
(My heart surmised) must crouch in that tent's corner, curved
Like Spring-month's russet moon, some girl by fate reserved
To give me once again the electric snap and spark
Which prove, when finger finds out finger in the dark
O' the world, there's fire and life and truth there, link but hands
And pass the secret on. Lo, link by link, expands
The circle, lengthens out the chain, till one embrace
Of high with low is found uniting the whole race,
Not simply you and me and our Fifine, but all
The world: the Fair expands into the Carnival,
And Carnival again to . . . ah, but that's my dream!

XCII.

I somehow played the piece: remarked on each old theme
I' the new dress; saw how food o' the soul, the stuff that's made
To furnish man with thought and feeling, is purveyed
Substantially the same from age to age, with change
Of the outside only for successive feasters. Range
The banquet-room o' the world, from the dim farthest head
O' the table, to its foot, for you and me be-spread,
This merry morn, we find sufficient fare, I trow.
But, novel? Scrape away the sauce; and taste, below,

The verity o' the viand,—you shall perceive there went
To board-head just the dish which other condiment
Makes palatable now: guests came, sat down, fell-to,
Rose up, wiped mouth, went way,—lived, died,—and never knew
That generations yet should, seeking sustenance,
Still find the selfsame fare, with somewhat to enhance
Its flavour, in the kind of cooking. As with hates
And loves and fears and hopes, so with what emulates
The same, expresses hates, loves, fears and hopes in Art:
The forms, the themes—no one without its counterpart
Ages ago; no one but, mumbled the due time
I' the mouth of the eater, needs be cooked again in rhyme,
Dished up anew in paint, sauce-smothered fresh in sound,
To suit the wisdom-tooth, just cut, of the age, that's found
With gums obtuse to gust and smack which relished so
The meat o' the meal folk made some fifty years ago.
But don't suppose the new was able to efface
The old without a struggle, a pang! The commonplace
Still clung about his heart, long after all the rest
O' the natural man, at eye and ear, was caught, confessed
The charm of change, although wry lip and wrinkled nose
Owned ancient virtue more conducive to repose
Than modern nothings roused to somethings by some shred
Of pungency, perchance garlic in amber's stead.
And so on, till one day, another age, by due
Rotation, pries, sniffs, smacks, discovers old is new,
And sauce, our sires pronounced insipid, proves again
Sole piquant, may resume its titillating reign—
With music, most of all the arts, since change is there
The law, and not the lapse: the precious means the rare,
And not the absolute in all good save surprise.
So I remarked upon our Schumann's victories
Over the commonplace, how faded phrase grew fine,
And palled perfection—piqued, upstartled by that brine,
His pickle—bit the mouth and burnt the tongue aright,
Beyond the merely good no longer exquisite:
Then took things as I found, and thanked without demur
The pretty piece—played through that movement, you prefer,
Where dance and shuffle past,—he scolding while she pouts,
She canting while he calms,—in those eternal bouts
Of age, the dog—with youth, the cat—by rose-festoon
Tied teasingly enough—Columbine, Pantaloon:
She, toe-tips and *staccato*,—*legato* shakes his poll
And shambles in pursuit, the senior. *Fi la folle!*
Lie to him! get his gold and pay its price! begin
Your trade betimes, nor wait till you've wed Harlequin
And need, at the week's end, to play the duteous wife,
And swear you still love slaps and leapings more than life!
Pretty! I say.

XCIII.

And so, I somehow-nohow played
The whole o' the pretty piece; and then . . . whatever weighed
My eyes down, furled the films about my wits? suppose,
The morning-bath,—the sweet monotony of those

Three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp at all,—
Or else the brain's fatigue, forced even here to fall
Into the same old track, and recognize the shift
From old to new, and back to old again, and,—swift
Or slow, no matter,—still the certainty of change,
Conviction we shall find the false, where'er we range,
In art no less than nature: or what if wrist were numb,
And over-tense the muscle, abductor of the thumb,
Taxed by those tenths' and twelfths' unconscionable stretch?
Howe'er it came to pass, I soon was far to fetch—
Gone off in company with Music!

XCIV.

Whither bound
Except for Venice? She it was, by instinct found
Carnival-country proper, who far below the perch
Where I was pinnacled, showed, opposite, Mark's Church,
And, underneath, Mark's Square, with those two lines of street,
Procuratié-sides, each leading to my feet—
Since from above I gazed, however I got there.

XCV.

And what I gazed upon was a prodigious Fair,
Concourse immense of men and women, crowned or casqued,
Turbaned or tiar'd, wreathed, plumed, hatted or wigged, but masked—
Always masked, — only, how? No face-shape, beast or bird,
Nay, fish and reptile even, but someone had preferred,
From out its frontispiece, feathered or scaled or curled,
To make the vizard whence himself should view the world,
And where the world believed himself was manifest.
Yet when you came to look, mixed up among the rest
More funnily by far, were masks to imitate
Humanity's mishap: the wrinkled brow, bald pate
And rheumy eyes of Age, peak'd chin and parchment chap,
Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near,—mishap
Merely; but, Age reduced to simple greed and guile,
Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile
A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread
Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead,—
Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth?
Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,
Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare
On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair
Which covers nothing.

XCVI.

These, you are to understand,
Were the mere hard and sharp distinctions. On each hand,
I soon became aware, flocked the infinitude
Of passions, loves and hates, man pampers till his mood
Becomes himself, the whole sole face we name him by,
Nor want denotement else, if age or youth supply
The rest of him: old, young,—classed creature: in the main
A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain
Some one way through the flesh—the face, an evidence
O' the soul at work inside; and, all the more intense,
So much the more grotesque.

XCVII.

"Why should each soul be tasked
Some one way, by one love or else one hate?"
I asked.
When it occurred to me, from all these sights beneath
There rose not any sound: a crowd, yet dumb as death!

XCVIII.

Soon I knew why. (Propose a riddle, and 'tis solved
Forthwith—in dream!) They spoke; but,—since on me devolved
To see, and understand by sight,—the vulgar speech
Might be dispensed with. "He who cannot see, must reach
As best he may the truth of men by help of words
They please to speak, must fare at will of who affords
The banquet,"—so I thought. "Who sees not, hears and so
Gets to believe; myself it is that, seeing, know,
And, knowing, can dispense with voice and vanity
Of speech. What hinders then, that, drawing closer, I
Put privilege to use, see and know better still
These *simulacra*, taste the profit of my skill,
Down in the midst?"

XCIX.

And plumb I pitched into the square—
A groundling like the rest. What think you happened there?
Precise the contrary of what one would expect!
For,—whereas so much more monstrosities deflect
From nature and the type, as you the more approach
Their precinct,—here, I found brutality encroach
Less on the human, lie the lightlier as I looked
The nearlier on these faces that seemed but now so crook'd
And clawed away from God's prime purpose. They diverged
A little from the type, but somehow rather urged
To pity than disgust: the prominent, before,
Now dwindled into mere distinctness, nothing more.
Still, at first sight, stood forth undoubtedly the fact
Some deviation was: in no one case there lacked
The certain sign and mark,—say hint, say, trick of lip
Or twist of nose,—that proved a fault in workmanship,
Change in the prime design, some hesitancy here
And there, which checked the man and let the beast appear;
But that was all.

C.

All: yet enough to bid each tongue
Lie in abeyance still. They talked, themselves among,
Of themselves, to themselves; I saw the mouths at play,
The gesture that enforced, the eye that strove to say
The same thing as the voice, and seldom gained its point
—That this was so, I saw; but all seemed out of joint
I' the vocal medium 'twixt the world and me. I gained
Knowledge by notice, not by giving ear,—attained
To truth by what men seemed, not said: to me one glance
Was worth whole histories of noisy utterance,
—At least, to me in dream.

CI.

And presently I found
That, just as ugliness had withered, so unwound
Itself, and perished off, repugnance to what wrong
Might linger yet i' the make of man. My will was strong

I' the matter; I could pick and choose, project my weight :
(Remember how we saw the boatman trim his freight !)
Determine to observe, or manage to escape,
Or make divergency assume another shape
By shift of point of sight in me the observer : thus
Corrected, added to, subtracted from, — discuss
Each variant quality, and brute-beast touch was turned
Into mankind's safeguard ! Force, guile, were arms which earned
My praise, not blame at all : for we must learn to live,
Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,
But plated for defence, nay, furnished for attack,
With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back
May suffer in that squeeze with nature, we find—life.
Are we not here to learn the good of peace through strife,
Of love through hate, and reach knowledge by ignorance ?
Why, those are helps thereto, which late we eyed askance,
And nicknamed unaware ! Just so, a sword we call
Superfluous, and cry out against, at festival :
Wear it in time of war, its clink and clatter grate
O' the ear to purpose then !

CII.

I found, one must abate
One's scorn of the soul's casing, distinct from the soul's self—
Which is the centre-drop : whereas the pride in pelf,
The lust to seem the thing it cannot be, the greed
For praise, and all the rest seen outside,—these indeed
Are the hard polished cold crystal environment
Of those strange orbs unearthed i' the Druid temple, meant
For divination (so the learned please to think)
Wherein you may admire one dew-drop roll and wink,
All unaffected by — quite alien to — what sealed
And saved it long ago : though how it got congealed
I shall not give a guess, nor how, by power occult,
The solid surface-shield was outcome and result
Of simple dew at work to save itself amid
The unwatery force around ; protected thus, dew slid
Safe through all opposites, impatient to absorb
Its spot of life, and last for ever in the orb
We, now, from hand to hand pass with impunity.

CIII.

And the delight wherewith I watch this crowd must be
Akin to that which crowns the chemist when he winds
Thread up and up, till clue be fairly clutched, —unbinds
The composite, ties fast the simple to its mate,
And, tracing each effect back to its cause, elate,
Constructs in fancy, from the fewest primitives,
The complex and complete, all diverse life, that lives
Not only in beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, but
The very plants and earths and ores. Just so I glut
My hunger both to be and know the thing I am,
By contrast with the thing I am not ; so, through sham
And outside, I arrive at inmost real, probe
And prove how the nude form obtained the chequered robe.

CIV.

—Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,
Here, there and everywhere i' the world, without debate!
Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square
Rather than Timbuctoo?

CV.

And I became aware,
Scarcely the word escaped my lips, that swift ensued
In silence and by stealth, and yet with certitude,
A formidable change of the amphitheatre
Which held the Carnival; although the human stir
Continued just the same amid that shift of scene.

CVI.

For as on edifice of cloud i' the grey and green
Of evening,—built about some glory of the west,
To barricade the sun's departure,—manifest,
He plays, pre-eminently gold, gilds vapour, crag and crest
Which bend in rapt suspense above the act and deed
They cluster round and keep their very own, nor heed
The world at watch; while we, breathlessly at the base
O' the castellated bulk, note momently the mace
Of night fall here, fall there, bring change with every blow,
Alike to sharpened shaft and broadened portico
I' the structure: heights and depths, beneath the leaden stress,
Crumble and melt and mix together, coälesce,
Re-form, but sadder still, subdued yet more and more
By every fresh defeat, till wearied eyes need pore
No longer on the dull impoverished decadence
Of all that pomp of pile in towering evidence
So lately:—

CVII.

Even thus nor otherwise, meseemed
That if I fixed my gaze awhile on what I dreamed
Was Venice' Square, Mark's Church, the scheme was straight unschemed,
A subtle something had its way within the heart
Of each and every house I watched, with counterpart
Of tremor through the front and outward face, until
Mutation was at end; impassive and stock-still
Stood now the ancient house, grown—new, is scarce the phrase,
Since older, in a sense,—altered to . . . what i' the ways,
Ourselves are wont to see, coërced by city, town
Or village, anywhere i' the world, pace up or down
Europe! In all the maze, no single tenement
I saw, but I could claim acquaintance with.

CVIII.

There went
Conviction to my soul, that what I took of late
For Venice was the world; its Carnival—the state
Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence
For all time, and no one particular feast-day. Whence
'Twas easy to infer what meant my late disgust
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of greed and lust
And idle hate, and love as impotent for good—
When from my pride of place I passed the interlude
In critical review; and what, the wonder that ensued

When, from such pinnacled pre-eminence, I found
Somehow the proper goal for wisdom was the ground
And not the sky,—so, slid sagaciously betimes
Down heaven's baluster-rope, to reach the mob of mimes
And mummers; whereby came discovery there was just
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust,
Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different names
According to what stage i' the process turned his rough,
Even as I gazed, to smooth—only get close enough!
—What was all this except the lesson of a life?

CIX.

And—consequent upon the learning how from strife
Grew peace—from evil, good—came knowledge that, to get
Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must nor fret
Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,
But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be,
And, with as good a grace, welcome what is—we find.

CX.

Is—for the hour, observe! Since something to my mind
Suggested soon the fancy, nay, certitude that change,
Never suspending touch, continued to derange
What architecture, we, walled up within the cirque
O' the world, consider fixed as fate, not fairy-work.
For those were temples, sure, which tremblingly grew blank
From bright, then broke afresh in triumph,—ah, but sank
As soon, for liquid change through artery and vein
O' the very marble wound its way! And first a stain
Would startle and offend amid the glory; next,
Spot swift succeeded spot, but found me less perplexed
By portents; then as 'twere a sleepiness soft stole
Over the stately fane, and shadow sucked the whole
Façade into itself, made uniformly earth
What was a piece of heaven; till, lo, a second birth,
And the veil broke away because of something new
Inside, that pushed to gain an outlet, paused in view
At last, and proved a growth of stone or brick or wood
Which, alien to the aim o' the Builder, somehow stood
The test, could satisfy, if not the early race
For whom he built, at least our present populace,
Who must not bear the blame for what, blamed, proves mishap
Of the Artist: his work gone, another fills the gap,
Serves the prime purpose so. Undoubtedly there spreads
Building around, above, which makes men lift their heads
To look at, or look through, or look—for aught I care—
Over: if only up, it is, not down, they stare,
"Commercing with the skies," and not the pavement in the Square.

CXI.

But are they only temples that subdivide, collapse,
And tower again, transformed? Academies, perhaps!

Domes where dwells Learning, seats of Science, bower and hall
Which house Philosophy—do these, too, rise and fall,
Based though foundations be on steadfast mother-earth,
With no chimeric claim to supermundane birth,
No boast that, dropped from cloud, they did not grow from ground?
Why, these fare worst of all! these vanish and are found
Nowhere, by who tasks eye some twice within his term
Of threescore years and ten, for tidings what each germ
Has burgeoned out into, whereof the promise stunned
His ear with such acclaim,—praise-payment to refund
The praisers, never doubt, some twice before they die
Whose days are long i' the land.

CXII.

Alack, Philosophy!
Despite the chop and change, diminished or increased,
Patched-up and plastered-o'er, Religion stands at least
I' the temple-type. But thou? Here gape I, all agog
These thirty years, to learn how tadpole turns to frog;
And thrice at least have gazed with mild astonishment,
As, skyward up and up, some fire-new fabric sent
Its challenge to mankind that, clustered underneath
To hear the word, they straight believe, ay, in the teeth
O' the Past, clap hands and hail triumphant Truth's outbreak—
Tadpole-frog-theory propounded past mistake!
In vain! A something ails the edifice, it bends,
It bows, it buries . . . Haste! cry "Heads below" to friends—
But have no fear they find, when smother shall subside,
Some substitution perk with unabated pride
I' the predecessor's place!

CXIII.

No,—the one voice which failed
Never, the preachment's coign of vantage nothing ailed,—
That had the luck to lodge i' the house not made with hands!
And all it preached was this: "Truth builds upon the sands,
Though stationed on a rock: and so her work decays,
And so she builds afresh, with like result. Nought stays
But just the fact that Truth not only is, but fain
Would have men know she needs must be, by each so plain
Attempt to visibly inhabit where they dwell."
Her works are work, while she is she; that work does well
Which lasts mankind their life-time through, and lets believe
One generation more, that, though sand run through sieve,
Yet earth now reached is rock, and what we moderns find
Erected here is Truth, who, 'stablished to her mind
I' the fulness of the days, will never change in show
More than in substance erst: men thought they knew; we know!

CXIV.

Do you, my generation? Well, let the blocks prove mist
I' the main enclosure,—church and college, if they list,
Be something for a time, and everything anon,
And anything awhile, as fit is off or on,
Till they grow nothing, soon to re-appear no less
As something,—shape re-shaped, till out of shapelessness

Come shape again as sure! no doubt, or round or square
Or polygon its front, some building will be there,
Do duty in that nook o' the wall o' the world where once
The Architect saw fit precisely to ensconce
College or church, and bid such bulwark guard the line
O' the barrier round about, humanity's confine.

CXV.

Leave watching change at work i' the greater scale, on these
The main supports, and turn to their interstices
Filled up by fabrics too, less costly and less rare,
Yet of importance, yet essential to the Fair
They help to circumscribe, instruct and regulate!
See, where each booth-front boasts, in letters small or great,
Its specialty, proclaims its privilege to stop
A breach, beside the best!

CXVI.

Here History keeps shop,
Tells how past deeds were done, so and not otherwise:
"Man! hold truth evermore! forget the early lies!"
There sits Morality, demure behind her stall,
Dealing out life and death: "This is the thing to call
Right, and this other, wrong; thus think, thus do, thus say,
Thus joy, thus suffer!—not to-day as yesterday—
Yesterday's doctrine dead, this only shall endure!
Obey its voice and live!"—enjoins the dame demure.
While Art gives flag to breeze, bids drum beat, trumpet blow,
Inviting eye and ear to yonder raree-show.
Up goes the canvas, hauled to height of pole. I think,
We know the way—long lost, late learned—to paint! A wink
Of eye, and lo, the pose! the statue on its plinth!
How could we moderns miss the heart o' the labyrinth
Perversely all these years, permit the Greek seclude
His secret till to-day? And here's another feud
Now happily composed: inspect this quartett-score!
Got long past melody, no word has Music more
To say to mortal man! But is the bard to be
Behindhand? Here's his book, and now perhaps you see
At length what poetry can do!

CXVII.

Why, that's stability
Itself, that change on change we sorrowfully saw
Creep o'er the prouder piles! We acquiesced in law
When the fine gold grew dim i' the temple, when the brass
Which pillared that so brave abode where Knowledge was,
Bowed and resigned the trust; but, bear all this caprice,
Harlequinade where swift to birth succeeds decease
Of hue at every turn o' the tinsel-flag which flames
While Art holds booth in Fair? Such glories chased by shames
Like these, distract beyond the solemn and august
Procedure to decay, evanishment in dust,
Of those marmoreal[1] domes,—above vicissitude,
We used to hope!

CXVIII.

"So, all is change, in fine," pursued
The preachment to a pause. When—"All is permanence!"
Returned a voice. Within? without? No matter whence

[1] Marble-like.

The explanation came: for, understand, I ought
To simply say—"I saw," each thing I say
"I thought."
Since ever as, unrolled, the strange scene-picture grew
Before me, sight flashed first, though mental comment too
Would follow in a trice, come hobblingly to halt.

CXIX.

So, what did I see next but,—much as when the vault
I' the west,—wherein we watch the vapoury manifold
Transfiguration,—tired turns blaze to black, —behold,
Peak reconciled to base, dark ending feud with bright,
The multiform subsides, becomes the definite.
Contrasting life and strife, where battle they i' the blank
Severity of peace in death, for which we thank
One wind that comes to quell the concourse, drive at last
Things to a shape which suits the close of things, and cast
Palpably o'er vexed earth heaven's mantle of repose?

CXX.

Just so, in Venice' Square, that things were at the close
Was signalled to my sense; for I perceived arrest
O' the change all round about. As if some impulse pressed
Each gently into each, what was distinctness, late,
Grew vague, and, line from line no longer separate,
No matter what its style, edifice . . . shall I say,
Died into edifice? I find no simpler way
Of saying how, without or dash or shock or trace
Of violence, I found unity in the place
Of temple, tower,—nay, hall and house and hut,—one blank
Severity of peace in death; to which they sank
Resigned enough, till . . . ah, conjecture, I beseech,
What special blank did they agree to, all and each?
What common shape was that wherein they mutely merged
Likes and dislikes of form, so plain before?

CXXI.

I urged
Your step this way, prolonged our path of enterprise
To where we stand at last, in order that your eyes
Might see the very thing, and save my tongue describe
The Druid monument which fronts you. Could I bribe
Nature to come in aid, illustrate what I mean,
What wants there she should lend to solemnize the scene?

CXXII.

How does it strike you, this construction gaunt and grey—
Sole object, these piled stones, that gleam unground-away
By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine all beside
I' the solitary waste we grope through? Oh, no guide
Need we to grope our way and reach the monstrous door
Of granite! Take my word, the deeper you explore
That caverned passage, filled with fancies to the brim,
The less will you approve the adventure! such a grim
Bar-sinister soon blocks abrupt your path, and ends
All with a cold dread shape,—shape whereon Learning spends
Labour, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss,
While Ignorance reads right—recoiling from that Cross!

Whence came the mass and mass, strange quality of stone
Unquarried anywhere i' the region round? Unknown!
Just as unknown, how such enormity could be
Conveyed by land, or else transported over sea,
And laid in order, so, precisely each on each,
As you and I would build a grotto where the beach
Sheds shell—to last an hour: this building lasts from age
To age the same. But why?

CXXIII.

Ask Learning! I engage
You get a prosy wherefore, shall help you to advance
In knowledge just as much as helps you Ignorance
Surmising, in the mouth of peasant-lad or lass,
"I heard my father say he understood it was
A building, people built as soon as earth was made
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.
They laboured that their work might last, and show thereby
He stays, while we and earth, and all things come and go.
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and gone, we know
Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best
Attention: we must wait and die to know the rest.
Ask, if that's true, what use in setting up the pile?
To make one fear and hope: remind us, all the while
We come and go, outside there's Somebody that stays;
A circumstance which ought to make us mind our ways,
Because,—whatever end we answer by this life,—
Next time, best chance must be for who, with toil and strife,
Manages now to live most like what he was meant
Become: since who succeeds so far, 'tis evident,
Stands foremost on the file; who fails, has less to hope
From new promotion. That's the rule—with even a rope
Of mushrooms, like this rope I dangle! those that grew
Greatest and roundest, all in life they had to do,
Gain a reward, a grace they never dreamed, I think;
Since, outside white as milk and inside black as ink,
They go to the Great House to make a dainty dish
For Don and Donna; while this basket-load, I wish
Well off my arm, it breaks,—no starveling of the heap
But had his share of dew, his proper length of sleep
I' the sunshine: yet, of all, the outcome is—this queer
Cribbed quantity of dwarfs which burthen basket here
Till I reach home; 'tis there that, having run their rigs,
They end their earthly race, are flung as food for pigs.
Any more use I see? Well, you must know, there lies
Something, the Curé says, that points to mysteries
Above our grasp: a huge stone pillar, once upright,
Now laid at length, half-lost — discreetly shunning sight
I' the bush and briar, because of stories in the air—
Hints what it signified, and why was stationed there,

Once on a time. In vain the Curé tasked his lungs—
Showed, in a preachment, how, at bottom of the rungs
O' the ladder, Jacob saw, where heavenly angels stept
Up and down, lay a stone which served him, while he slept,
For pillow; when he woke, he set the same upright
As pillar, and a-top poured oil: things requisite
To instruct posterity, there mounts from floor to roof,
A staircase, earth to heaven; and also put in proof,
When we have scaled the sky, we well may let alone
What raised us from the ground, and,—paying to the stone
Proper respect, of course,—take staff and go our way,
Leaving the Pagan night for Christian break of day.
'For,' preached he, 'what they dreamed, these Pagans wide-awake
'We Christians may behold. How strange, then, were mistake
'Did anybody style the stone,—because of drop
'Remaining there from oil which Jacob poured a-top,—
'Itself the Gate of Heaven, itself the end, and not
'The means thereto!' Thus preached the Curé, and no jot
The more persuaded people but that, what once a thing
Meant and had right to mean, it still must mean. So cling
Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,
Through rude charactery, than all the grace it lends,
That lettering of your scribes! who flourish pen apace
And ornament the text, they say—we say, efface.
Hence, when the earth began its life afresh in May,
And fruit-trees bloomed, and waves would wanton, and the bay
Ruffle its wealth of weed, and stranger-birds arrive,
And beasts take each a mate,—folk, too, found sensitive,
Surmised the old grey stone upright there, through such tracts
Of solitariness and silence, kept the facts
Entrusted it, could deal out doctrine, did it please:
No fresh and frothy draught, but liquor on the lees,
Strong, savage and sincere: first bleedings from a vine
Whereof the product now do Curés so refine
To insipidity, that, when heart sinks, we strive
And strike from the old stone the old restorative.
'Which is?'—why, go and ask our grandames how they used
To dance around it, till the Curé disabused
Their ignorance, and bade the parish in a band
Lay flat the obtrusive thing that cumbered so the land!
And there, accordingly, in bush and briar it—'bides
'Its time to rise again!' (so somebody derides,
That's pert from Paris) 'since, yon spire, you keep erect
'Yonder, and pray beneath, is nothing, I suspect,
'But just the symbol's self, expressed in slate for rock,
'Art's smooth for Nature's rough, new chip from the old block!'
There, sir, my say is said! Thanks, and Saint Gille increase
The wealth bestowed so well!"—wherewith he pockets piece,

Doffs cap, and takes the road. I leave in Learning's clutch
More money for his book, but scarcely gain as much.

CXXIV.

To this it was, this same primæval monument,
That, in my dream, I saw building with building blent
Fall: each on each they fast and founderingly went
Confusion-ward; but thence again subsided fast,
Became the mound you see. Magnificently massed
Indeed, those mammoth-stones, piled by the Protoplast
Temple-wise in my dream! beyond compare with fanes
Which, solid-looking late, had left no least remains
I' the bald and blank, now sole usurper of the plains
Of heaven, diversified and beautiful before.
And yet simplicity appeared to speak no more
Nor less to me than spoke the compound. At the core,
One and no other word, as in the crust of late,
Whispered, which, audible through the transition-state,
Was no loud utterance in even the ultimate
Disposure. For as some imperial chord subsists,
Steadily underlies the accidental mists
Of music springing thence, that run their mazy race
Around, and sink, absorbed, back to the triad base,—
So, out of that one word, each variant rose and fell
And left the same "All's change, but permanence as well."
—Grave note whence—list aloft!—harmonics sound, that mean:
"Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.
The individual soul works through the shows of sense,
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length 'God, man, or both together mixed,'
Transparent through the flesh, by parts which prove a whole,
By hints which make the soul discernible by soul—
Let only soul look up, not down, not hate but love,
As truth successively takes shape, one grade above
Its last presentment, tempts as it were truth indeed
Revealed this time; so tempts, till we attain to read
The signs aright, and learn, by failure, truth is forced
To manifest itself through falsehood; whence divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby.
Then do we understand the value of a lie;
Its purpose served, its truth once safe deposited,
Each lie, superfluous now, leaves, in the singer's stead,
The indubitable song; the historic personage
Put by, leaves prominent the impulse of his age;
Truth sets aside speech, act, time, place, indeed, but brings
Nakedly forward now the principle of things
Highest and least."

CXXV.

Wherewith change ends. What change to dread
When, disengaged at last from every veil, instead

Of type remains the truth? once—falsehood: but anon
Theosuton e broteion eper kekramenon,
Something as true as soul is true, though veils between
Prove false and fleet away. As I mean, did he mean,
The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear
A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and drear
Brought comfort to the Titan? Emerging from the lymph,
"God, man, or mixture" proved only to be a nymph:
"From whom the clink on clink of metal" (money, judged
Abundant in my purse) "struck" (bumped at, till it budged)
"The modesty, her soul's habitual resident"
(Where late the sisterhood were lively in their tent)
"As out of wingèd car" (that caravan on wheels)
"Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels,"
And "Fear not, friends we flock!" soft smiled the sea-Fifine—
Primitive of the veils (if he meant what I mean)
The poet's Titan learned to lift, ere "Three-formed Fate,
Moirai Trimorphoi" stood unmasked the Ultimate.

CXXVI.

Enough o' the dream! You see how poetry turns prose.
Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close
Down to mere commonplace old facts which everybody knows.
So dreaming disappoints! The fresh and strange at first,
Soon wears to trite and tame, nor warrants the outburst
Of heart with which we hail those heights, at very brink
Of heaven, whereto one least of lifts would lead, we think,
But wherefrom quick decline conducts our step, we find,
To homely earth, old facts familiar left behind.
Did not this monument, for instance, long ago
Say all it had to say, show all it had to show,
Nor promise to do duty more in dream?

CXXVII.

Awaking so,
What if we, homeward-bound, all peace and some fatigue,
Trudge, soberly complete our tramp of near a league,
Last little mile which makes the circuit just, Elvire?
We end where we began: that consequence is clear.
All peace and some fatigue, wherever we were nursed
To life, we bosom us on death, find last is first
And thenceforth final too.

CXXVIII.

"Why final? Why the more
Worth credence now than when such truth proved false before?"
Because a novel point impresses now: each lie
Redounded to the praise of man, was victory
Man's nature had both right to get, and might to gain,
And by no means implied submission to the reign
Of other quite as real a nature, that saw fit
To have its way with man, not man his way with it.
This time, acknowledgment and acquiescence quell
Their contrary in man; promotion proves as well
Defeat: and Truth, unlike the False with Truth's outside,
Neither plumes up his will nor puffs him out with pride.

I fancy, there must lurk some cogency i' the claim,
Man, such abatement made, submits to, all the same.
Soul finds no triumph, here, to register like Sense
With whom 'tis ask and have,—the want, the evidence
That the thing wanted, soon or late, will be supplied.
This indeed plumes up will; this, sure, puffs out with pride,
When, reading records right, man's instincts still attest
Promotion comes to Sense because Sense likes it best;
For bodies sprouted legs, through a desire to run:
While hands, when fain to filch, got fingers one by one,
And nature, that's ourself, accommodative brings
To bear that, tired of legs which walk, we now bud wings
Since of a mind to fly. Such savour in the nose
Of Sense, would stimulate Soul sweetly, I suppose,
Soul with its proper itch of instinct, prompting clear
To recognize soul's self Soul's only master here
Alike from first to last. But, if time's pressure, light's
Or rather, dark's approach, wrest thoroughly the rights
Of rule away, and bid the soul submissive bear
Another soul than it play master everywhere
In great and small,—this time, I fancy, none disputes
There's something in the fact that such conclusion suits
Nowise the pride of man, nor yet chimes in with attributes
Conspicuous in the lord of nature. He receives
And not demands—not first likes faith and then believes.

CXXIX.

And as with the last essence so with its first faint type.
Inconstancy means raw, 'tis faith alone means ripe
I' the soul which runs its round: no matter how it range
From Helen to Fifine, Elvire bids back the change
To permanence. Here, too, love ends where love began.
Such ending looks like law, because the natural man
Inclines the other way, feels lordlier free than bound.
Poor pabulum for pride when the first love is found
Last also! and, so far from realizing gain,
Each step aside just proves divergency in vain.
The wanderer brings home no profit from his quest
Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best
Could life begin anew. His problem posed aright
Was—"From the given point evolve the infinite!"
Not—"Spend thyself in space, endeavouring to joint
Together, and so make infinite, point and point:
Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!"
Fifine, the foam-flake, she: Elvire, the sea's self, means
Capacity at need to shower how many such!
And yet we left her calm profundity, to clutch
Foam-flutter, bell on bell, that, bursting at a touch,
Blistered us for our pains. But wise, we want no more
O' the fickle element. Enough of foam and roar!
Land-locked, we live and die henceforth: for here's the villa-door.

CXXX.

How pallidly you pause o' the threshold! Hardly night,
Which drapes you, ought to make real flesh and blood so white!
Touch me, and so appear alive to all intents!
Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents?
Suppose you are a ghost! A memory, a hope,
A fear, a conscience! Quick! Give back the hand I grope
I' the dusk for!

CXXXI.

That is well. Our double horoscope
I cast, while you concur. Discard that simile
O' the fickle element! Elvire is land not sea—
The solid land, the safe. All these word-bubbles came
O' the sea, and bite like salt. The unlucky bath's to blame.
This hand of yours on heart of mine, no more the bay
I beat, nor bask beneath the blue! In Pornic, say,
The Mayor shall catalogue me duly domiciled,
Contributable, good-companion of the guild
And mystery of marriage. I stickle for the town,
And not this tower apart; because, though, half-way down,
Its mullions wink o'erwebbed with bloomy greenness, yet
Who mounts to staircase top may tempt the parapet,
And sudden there's the sea! No memories to arouse,
No fancies to delude! Our honest civic house
Of the earth be earthy too!—or graced perchance with shell
Made prize of long ago, picked haply where the swell
Menaced a little once—or seaweed-branch that yet
Dampens and softens, notes a freak of wind, a fret
Of wave: though, why on earth should sea-change mend or mar
The calm contemplative householders that we are?
So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide:
E'en past astonishment how sunrise and springtide
Could tempt one forth to swim; the more if time appoints
That swimming grow a task for one's rheumatic joints.
Such honest civic house, behold, I constitute
Our villa! Be but flesh and blood, and smile to boot!
Enter for good and all! then fate bolt fast the door,
Shut you and me inside, never to wander more!

CXXXII.

Only,—you do not use to apprehend attack!
No doubt, the way I march, one idle arm, thrown slack
Behind me, leaves the open hand defenceless at the back,
Should an impertinent on tiptoe steal, and stuff
—Whatever can it be? A letter sure enough,
Pushed betwixt palm and glove! That largess of a franc?
Perhaps inconsciously,—to better help the blank
O' the nest, her tambourine, and, laying egg, persuade
A family to follow, the nest-egg that I laid
May have contained,—but just to foil suspicious folk,—
Between two silver whites a yellow double yolk!
Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain—
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!

EPILOGUE.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

I.

Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone:
Dreary, weary with the long day's work:
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone:
Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we!—
"What, and is it really you again?" quoth I:
"I again, what else did you expect?" quoth She.

II.

"Never mind, hie away from this old house—
Every crumbling brick embrowned with sin and shame!
Quick, in its corners ere certain shapes arouse!
Let them—every devil of the night—lay claim,
Make and mend, or rap and rend, for me! Good-bye!
God be their guard from disturbance at their glee,
Till, crash, comes down the carcass in a heap!" quoth I:
"Nay, but there's a decency required!" quoth She.

III.

"Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days, nights!
All the neighbour-talk with man and maid —such men!
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights:
All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof; and then,
All the fancies . . . Who were they had leave, dared try
Darker arts that almost struck despair in me?
If you knew but how I dwelt down here!" quoth I:
"And was I so better off up there?" quoth She.

IV.

"Help and get it over! *Re-united to his wife*
(How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know?)
Lies M., or N., departed from this life,
Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.
What i' the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try!
Affliction sore long time he bore, or, what is it to be?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end!" quoth I:
"I end with—Love is all and Death is nought!" quoth She.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

OR

TURF AND TOWERS.

1873.

[This poem is founded on a somewhat disagreeable story told at great length in the French newspapers at the time (1871). In the early proofs the real names of the young goldsmith and his leman appeared, but before publication imaginary names were substituted. "Turf" stands for the self-indulgent life, and "Towers" typify the life of struggle and self-mastery.]

TO

MISS THACKERAY.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

OR

TURF AND TOWERS.

I.

AND so, here happily we meet, fair friend!
Again once more, as if the years rolled back
And this our meeting-place were just that Rome
Out in the champaign, say, o'er-rioted
By verdure, ravage, and gay winds that war
Against strong sunshine settled to his sleep;
Or on the Paris Boulevard, might it prove,
You and I came together saunteringly,
Bound for some shop-front in the Place Vendôme—
Gold-smithy and Golconda mine, that makes
"The Firm-Miranda" blazed about the world—
Or, what if it were London, where my toe
Trespassed upon your flounce? "Small blame," you smile,
Seeing the Staircase Party in the Square
Was Small and Early, and you broke no rib.

Even as we met where we have met so oft,
Now meet we on this unpretending beach
Below the little village: little, ay!
But pleasant, may my gratitude subjoin?
Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-place,
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-ful Normandy!
That, just behind you, is mine own hired house:
With right of pathway through the field in front,
No prejudice to all its growth unsheaved
Of emerald luzern bursting into blue.
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall,
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate!
Yon yellow—what if not wild-mustard flower?—
Of that, my naked sole makes lawful prize,
Bruising the acrid aromatics out,
Till, what they preface, good salt savours sting
From, first, the sifted sands, then sands in slab,
Smooth save for pipy wreath-work of the worm:
(Granite and mussel-shell are ground alike
To glittering paste,—the live worm troubles yet.)
Then, dry and moist, the varech[1] limit-line,
Burnt cinder-black, with brown uncrumpled swathe
Of berried softness, sea-swoln thrice its size;
And, lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last,
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain.

Such is Saint-Rambert, wilder very much
Than Joyeux, that famed Joyous-Gard of yours,

[1] Kelp, seaweeds.

Some five miles farther down; much homelier too—
Right for me,—right for you the fine and fair!
Only, I could endure a transfer—wrought
By angels famed still, through our countryside,
For weights they fetched and carried in old time
When nothing like the need was—transfer, just
Of Joyeux church, exchanged for yonder prig,
Our brand-new stone cream-coloured masterpiece.

Well—and you know, and not since this one year,
The quiet seaside country? So do I:
Who like it, in a manner, just because
Nothing is prominently likeable
To vulgar eye without a soul behind,
Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball
Of sight, a beauty buried everywhere.
If we have souls, know how to see and use,
One place performs, like any other place,
The proper service every place on earth
Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike
To give him note that, through the place he sees,
A place is signified he never saw,
But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know.
Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment
May suffer, through its single rent in roof,
Admittance of a cataract of light
Beyond attainment through earth's palace-panes
Pinholed athwart their windowed filagree
By twinklings sobered from the sun outside.
Doubtless the High Street of our village here
Imposes hardly as Rome's Corso could:
And our projected race for sailing-boats
Next Sunday, when we celebrate our Saint,
Falls very short of that attractiveness,
That artistry in festive spectacle,
Paris ensures you when she welcomes back
(When shall it be?) the Assembly from Versailles;
While the best fashion and intelligence
Collected at the counter of our Mayor
(Dry goods he deals in, grocery beside)
What time the post-bag brings the news from Vire,—
I fear me much, it scarce would hold its own,
That circle, that assorted sense and wit,
With Five o'clock Tea in a house we know.

Still, 'tis the check that gives the leap its lift.
The nullity of cultivated souls,
Even advantaged by their news from Vire,
Only conduces to enforce the truth
That, thirty paces off, this natural blue
Broods o'er a bag of secrets, all unbroached,
Beneath the bosom of the placid deep,
Since first the Post Director sealed them safe;
And formidable I perceive this fact—
Little Saint-Rambert touches the great sea.
From London, Paris, Rome, where men are men,
Not mice, and mice not Mayors presumably,
Thought scarce may leap so fast, alight so far.
But this is a pretence, you understand,
Disparagement in play, to parry thrust
Of possible objector: nullity
And ugliness, the taunt be his, not mine
Nor yours,—I think we know the world too well!
Did you walk hither, jog it by the plain,
Or jaunt it by the highway, braving bruise
From springless and uncushioned vehicle?
Much, was there not, in place and people both,
To lend an eye to? and what eye like yours—
The learned eye is still the loving one!
Our land: its quietude, productiveness,
Its length and breadth of grain-crop, meadow-ground,
Its orchards in the pasture, farms a-field
And hamlets on the road-edge, nought you missed
Of one and all the sweet rusticities!
From stalwart strider by the waggon-side,
Brightening the acre with his purple blouse,
To those dark-featured comely women-folk,
Healthy and tall, at work, and work indeed,
On every cottage door-step, plying brisk
Bobbins that bob you ladies one such lace!
Oh, you observed! and how that nimble play
Of finger formed the sole exception, bobbed

The one disturbance to the peace of things,
Where nobody esteems it worth his while,
If time upon the clock-face goes asleep,
To give the rusted hands a helpful push.
Nobody lifts an energetic thumb
And index to remove some dead and gone
Notice which, posted on the barn, repeats
For truth what two years' passage made a lie.
Still is for sale, next June, that same château
With all its immobilities,—were sold
Duly next June behind the last but last;
And, woe's me, still placards the Emperor
His confidence in war he means to wage,
God aiding and the rural populace.
No: rain and wind must rub the rags away
And let the lazy land untroubled snore.

Ah, in good truth? and did the drowsihead
So suit, so soothe the learned loving eye,
That you were minded to confer a crown,
(Does not the poppy boast such?)—call the land
By one slow hither-thither stretching, fast
Subsiding-into-slumber sort of name,
Symbolic of the place and people too,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country?*" Excellent!
For they do, all, dear women young and old,
Upon the heads of them bear notably
This badge of soul and body in repose;
Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top,
Keeps woolly ward above that oval brown,
Its placid feature, more than muffler makes
A safeguard, circumvents intelligence
In—what shall evermore be named and famed,
If happy nomenclature aught avail,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country.*"

Do I hear—
Oh, better, very best of all the news—
You mean to catch and cage the winged word,
And make it breed and multiply at home
Till Norman idlesse stock our England too?
Normandy shown minute yet magnified
In one of those small books, the truly great,
We never know enough, yet know so well?
How I foresee the cursive diamond-dints,—
Composite pen that plays the pencil too,—
As, touch the page and up the glamour goes,
And filmily o'er grain-crop, meadow-ground,
O'er orchard in the pasture, farm a-field
And hamlet on the road-edge, floats and forms
And falls, at lazy last of all, the Cap
That crowns the country! we, awake outside,
Farther than ever from the imminence
Of what cool comfort, what close coverture
Your magic, deftly weaving, shall surround
The unconscious captives with. Be theirs to drowse
Trammeled, and ours to watch the trammel-trick!
Ours be it, as we con the book of books,
To wonder how is winking possible!

All hail, "White Cotton Night-cap Country," then!
And yet, as on the beach you promise book,—
On beach, mere razor-edge 'twixt earth and sea,
I stand at such a distance from the world
That 'tis the whole world which obtains regard,
Rather than any part, though part presumed
A perfect little province in itself,
When wayfare made acquaintance first therewith.
So standing, therefore, on this edge of things,
What if the backward glance I gave, return
Loaded with other spoils of vagrancy
Than I despatched it for, till I propose
The question—puzzled by the sudden store
Officious fancy plumps beneath my nose—
"Which sort of Night-cap have you glorified?"

You would be gracious to my ignorance:
"What other Night-cap than the normal one?—
Old honest guardian of man's head and hair
In its elastic yet continuous, soft,
No less persisting, circumambient gripe,—
Night's notice, life is respited from day!
Its form and fashion vary, suiting so
Each seasonable want of youth and age.
In infancy, the rosy naked ball
Of brain, and that faint golden fluff it bears,
Are smothered from disaster,—nurses know

By what foam-fabric; but when youth succeeds,
The sterling value of the article
Discards adornment, cap is cap henceforth
Unfeathered by the futile row on row.
Manhood strains hard a sturdy stocking-stuff
O'er well-deserving head and ears: the cone
Is tassel-tipt, commendably takes pride,
Announcing workday done and wages pouched,
And liberty obtained to sleep, nay, snore
Unwise, he peradventure shall essay
The sweets of independency for once—
Waive its advantage on his wedding-night:
Fool, only to resume it, night the next,
And never part companionship again.
Since, with advancing years, night's solace soon
Intrudes upon the daybreak dubious life
Persuades it to appear the thing it is,
Half-sleep; and so, encroaching more and more,
It lingers long past the abstemious meal
Of morning, and, as prompt to serve, precedes
The supper-summons, gruel grown a feast.
Finally, when the last sleep finds the eye
So tired it cannot even shut itself,
Does not a kind domestic hand unite
Friend to friend, lid from lid to part no more,
Consigned alike to that receptacle
So bleak without, so warm and white within?

"Night-caps, night's comfort of the human race:
Their usage may be growing obsolete,
Still, in the main, the institution stays.
And though yourself may possibly have lived,
And probably will die, undignified—
The Never-night-capped—more experienced folk
Laugh you back answer—What should Night-cap be
Save Night-cap pure and simple? Sorts of such?
Take cotton for the medium, cast an eye
This side to comfort, lambswool or the like,
That side to frilly cambric costliness,
And all between proves Night-cap proper." Add
"Fiddle!" and I confess the argument.

Only, your ignoramus here again
Proceeds as tardily to recognize
Distinctions: ask him what a fiddle means,
And "Just a fiddle" seems the apt reply.
Yet, is not there, while we two pace the beach,
This blessed moment, at your Kensington,
A special Fiddle-Show and rare array
Of all the sorts were ever set to cheek,
'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-hand-wise,
Or touched lute-fashion and forefinger-plucked?
I doubt not there be duly catalogued
Achievements all and some of Italy,
Guarnerius, Straduarius,[1]—old and new,
Augustly rude, refined to finicking,
This mammoth with his belly full of blare,
That mouse of music—inch-long silvery wheeze.
And here a specimen has effloresced
Into the scroll-head, there subsides supreme,
And with the tail-piece satisfies mankind.
Why should I speak of woods, grains, stains and streaks,
The topaz varnish or the ruby gum?
We preferably pause where tickets teach
"Over this sample would Corelli[2] croon,
Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove,
Most dulcet Giga,[3] dreamiest Saraband."[4]
"From this did Paganini comb the fierce
Electric sparks, or to tenuity
Pull forth the inmost wailing of the wire—
No cat-gut could swoon out so much of soul!"

Three hundred violin-varieties
Exposed to public view! And dare I doubt
Some future enterprise shall give the world
Quite as remarkable a Night-cap-show?
Methinks, we, arm-in-arm, that festal day,
Pace the long range of relics shrined aright,
Framed, glazed, each cushioned curiosity,
And so begin to smile and to inspect:

[1] Famous fiddle-makers.
[2] A famous fiddler and composer (1653–1713)
[3] Jig.
[4] A Spanish dance.

"Pope's sickly head-sustainment, damped
with dews
Wrung from the all-unfair fight: such a frame—
Though doctor and the devil helped their best—
Fought such a world that, waiving doctor's
help,
Had the mean devil at its service too!
Voltaire's imperial velvet! Hogarth eyed
The thumb-nail record of some alley-phyz,
Then chucklingly clapped yonder cosiness
On pate, and painted with true flesh and blood!
Poor hectic Cowper's soothing sarsnet-stripe!"
And so we profit by the catalogue,
Somehow our smile subsiding more and more,
Till we decline into . . . but no! shut eyes
And hurry past the shame uncoffined here,
The hangman's toilet! If we needs must trench,
For science' sake which craves completeness
still,
On the sad confine, not the district's self,
The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France:
It is historic, and we live to learn,
And try to learn by reading story-books.
It is an incident of 'Ninety-two,
And, twelve months since, the Commune
had the sway.
Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites
Presented you, a solitary Red
Shall pain us both, a minute and no more!
Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front
Of palace-window, in persuasion's name,
A spectacle above the howling mob
Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,
The outstart, the first spirt of blood on brow,
The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,
The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth
At odds with that half-purpose to be strong
And merely patient under misery!
And note the ejaculation, ground so hard
Between his teeth, that only God could hear,
As the lean pale proud insignificance
With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare
Out of the two grey points that did him stead
And passed their eagle-owner to the front
Better than his mob-elbowed undersize,—
The Corsican lieutenant commented

"Had I but one good regiment of my own,
How soon should volleys to the due amount
Lay stiff upon the street-flags this *canaille!*
As for the droll there, he that plays the
king
And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,
He's done for! Somebody must take his
place."
White Cotton Night-cap Country: excellent!
Why not Red Cotton Night-cap Country too?

"Why not say swans are black and black-
birds white,
Because the instances exist?" you ask.
"Enough that white, not red, predominates,
Is normal, typical, in cleric phrase
Quod semel, semper, et ubique." Here,
Applying such a name to such a land,
Especially you find inopportune,
Impertinent, my scruple whether white
Or red describes the local colour best.
"Let be" (you say), "the universe at large
Supplied us with exceptions to the rule,
So manifold, they bore no passing-by,—
Little Saint-Rambert has conserved at least
The pure tradition: white from head to heel,
Where is a hint of the ungracious hue?
See, we have traversed with hop, step and
jump,
From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,
Measured the garment (help my metaphor!)
Not merely criticized the cap, forsooth;
And were you pricked by that collecting-itch,
That pruriency for writing o'er your reds
'Rare, rarer, rarest, not rare but unique,'—
The shelf, Saint-Rambert, of your cabinet,
Unlabelled,—virginal, no Rahab-thread[1]
For blushing token of the spy's success,—
Would taunt with vacancy, I undertake!
What, yonder is your best apology,
Pretence at most approach to naughtiness,
Impingement of the ruddy on the blank?
This is the criminal Saint-Rambertese
Who smuggled in tobacco, half-a-pound!
The Octroi[2] found it out and fined the wretch.
This other is the culprit who despatched

[1] Joshua ii. 18.
[2] Taxes levied at the gates of cities.

A hare, he thought a hedgehog (clods obstruct),
Unfurnished with Permission for the Chase!
As to the womankind—renounce from those
The hope of getting a companion-tinge,
First faint touch promising romantic fault!"

Enough: there stands Red Cotton Night-cap shelf—
A cavern's ostentatious vacancy—
My contribution to the show; while yours—
Whites heap your row of pegs from every hedge
Outside, and house inside Saint-Rambert here—
We soon have come to end of. See, the church
With its white steeple gives your challenge point,
Perks as it were the night-cap of the town,
Starchedly warrants all beneath is matched
By all above, one snowy innocence!

You put me on my mettle. British maid
And British man, suppose we have it out
Here in the fields, decide the question so?
Then, British fashion, shake hands hard again,
Go home together, friends the more confirmed
That one of us—assuredly myself—
Looks puffy about eye, and pink at nose?
Which "pink" reminds me that the arduousness
We both acknowledge in the enterprise,
Claims, counts upon a large and liberal
Acceptance of as good as victory
In whatsoever just escapes defeat.
You must be generous, strain point, and call
Victory, any the least flush of pink
Made prize of, labelled scarlet for the nonce—
Faintest pretension to be wrong and red
And picturesque, that varies by a splotch
The righteous flat of insipidity.

Quick to the quest, then—forward, the firm foot!
Onward, the quarry-overtaking eye!

For, what is this, by way of march-tune, makes
The musicalest buzzing at my ear
By reassurance of that promise old
Though sins are scarlet they shall be as wool?
Whence—what fantastic hope do I deduce?
I am no Liebig: when the dyer dyes
A texture, can the red dye prime the white?
And if we washed well, wrung the texture hard,
Would we arrive, here, there and everywhere,
At a fierce ground beneath the surface meek?

I take the first chance, rub to threads what rag
Shall flutter snowily in sight. For see!
Already these few yards upon the rise,
Our back to brave Saint-Rambert, how we reach
The open, at a dozen steps or strides!
Turn round and look about, a breathing-while!
There lie, outspread at equidistance, thorpes
And villages and towns along the coast,
Distinguishable, each and all alike,
By white persistent Night-cap, spire on spire.
Take the left: yonder town is—what say you
If I say "Londres"? Ay, the mother-mouse
(Reversing fable, as truth can and will)
Which gave our mountain of a London birth!
This is the Conqueror's country, bear in mind,
And Londres-district blooms with London-pride.
Turn round: La Roche, to right, where oysters thrive:
Monlieu—the lighthouse is a telegraph;
This, full in front, Saint-Rambert; then succeeds
Villeneuve, and Pons the Young with Pons the Old,
And—ere faith points to Joyeux, out of sight,
A little nearer—oh, La Ravissante!

There now is something like a Night-cap spire,
Donned by no ordinary Notre-Dame!
For, one of the three safety-guards of France,
You front now, lady! Nothing intercepts

The privilege, by crow-flight, two miles far.
She and her sisters Lourdes and La Salette
Are at this moment hailed the cynosure
Of poor dear France, such waves have buffeted
Since she eschewed infallibility
And chose to steer by the vague compass-box.
This same midsummer month, a week ago,
Was not the memorable day observed
For reinstatement of the misused Three
In old supremacy for evermore?
Did not the faithful flock in pilgrimage
By railway, diligence and steamer—nay
On foot with staff and scrip, to see the sights
Assured them? And I say best sight was here:
And nothing justified the rival Two
In their pretension to equality;
Our folk laid out their ticket-money best,
And wiseliest, if they walked, wore shoe away;
Not who went farther only to fare worse.
For, what was seen at Lourdes and La Salette
Except a couple of the common cures
Such as all three can boast of, any day?
While here it was, here and by no means there,
That the Pope's self sent two great real gold crowns
As thick with jewelry as thick could stick,
His present to the Virgin and her Babe—
Provided for—who knows not?—by that fund,
Count Alessandro Sforza's legacy,
Which goes to crown some Virgin every year.
But this year, poor Pope was in prison-house,
And money had to go for something else;
And therefore, though their present seemed the Pope's,
The faithful of our province raised the sum
Preached and prayed out of—nowise purse alone.
Gentle and simple paid in kind, not cash,
The most part: the great lady gave her brooch,
The peasant-girl her hair-pin; 'twas the rough
Bluff farmer mainly who,—admonished well
By wife to care lest his new colewort-crop
Stray sorrowfully sparse like last year's seed,—
Lugged from reluctant pouch the fifty-franc,
And had the Curé's hope that rain would cease.

And so, the sum in evidence at length,
Next step was to obtain the donative
By the spontaneous bounty of the Pope—
No easy matter, since his Holiness
Had turned a deaf ear, long and long ago,
To much entreaty on our Bishop's part,
Commendably we boast. "But no," quoth he,
"Image and image needs must take their turn:
Here stand a dozen as importunate."
Well, we were patient; but the cup ran o'er
When—who was it pressed in and took the prize
But our own offset, set far off indeed
To grow by help of our especial name,
She of the Ravissante—in Martinique!
"What?" cried our patience at the boiling-point,
"The daughter crowned, the mother's head goes bare?
Bishop of Raimbaux!"—that's our diocese—
"Thou hast a summons to repair to Rome,
Be efficacious at the Council there:
Now is the time or never! Right our wrong!
Hie thee away, thou valued Morillon,
And have the promise, thou who hast the vote!"
So said, so done, so followed in due course
(To cut the story short) this festival,
This famous Twenty-second, seven days since.

Oh, but you heard at Joyeux! Pilgrimage,
Concourse, procession with, to head the host,
Cardinal Mirecourt, quenching lesser lights:
The leafy street-length through, decked end to end
With August-strippage, and adorned with flags
That would have waved right well but that it rained
Just this picked day, by some perversity.
And so were placed, on Mother and on Babe,
The pair of crowns: the Mother's, you must see!
Miranda, the great Paris goldsmith, made
The marvel,—he's a neighbour: that's his park
Before you, tree-topped wall we walk toward

His shop it was turned out the masterpiece,
Probably at his own expenditure;
Anyhow, his was the munificence
Contributed the central and supreme
Splendour that crowns the crown itself, The Stone.
Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply
That gem: he had to forage in New-York,
This jeweller, and country-gentleman,
And most undoubted devotee beside!
Worthily wived, too: since his wife it was
Bestowed "with friendly hand"—befitting phrase!
The lace which trims the coronation-robe—
Stiff wear—a mint of wealth on the brocade.
Do go and see what I saw yesterday!
And, for that matter, see in fancy still,
Since . . .

There now! Even for unthankful me,
Who stuck to my devotions at high-tide
That festal morning, never had a mind
To trudge the little league and join the crowd—
Even for me is miracle vouchsafed!
How pointless proves the sneer at miracles!
As if, contrariwise to all we want
And reasonably look to find, they graced
Merely those graced-before, grace helps no whit,
Unless, made whole, they need physician still.
I—sceptical in every inch of me—
Did I deserve that, from the liquid name
"Miranda,"—faceted as lovelily
As his own gift, the gem,—a shaft should shine,
Bear me along, another Abaris,[1]
Nor let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,
And yonder lies in luminosity!

Look, lady! where I bade you glance but now!
Next habitation, though two miles away,—
No tenement for man or beast between,—
That, park and domicile, is country-seat
Of this same good Miranda! I accept
The augury. Or there, or nowhere else,
Will I establish that a Night-cap gleams
Of visionary Red, not White for once!

[1] A priest of Apollo who cured diseases.

"Heaven" saith the sage "is with us, here inside
Each man:" "Hell also," simpleness subjoins,
By White and Red describing human flesh.

And yet as we continue, quicken pace,
Approach the object which determines me
Victorious or defeated, more forlorn
My chance seems,—that is certainty at least.
Halt midway, reconnoitre! Either side
The path we traverse (turn and see) stretch fields
Without a hedge: one level, scallop-striped[2]
With bands of beet and turnip and luzern,
Limited only by each colour's end,
Shelves down,—we stand upon an eminence,—
To where the earth-shell scallops out the sea,
A sweep of semicircle; and at edge—
Just as the milk-white incrustations stud
At intervals some shell-extremity,
So do the little growths attract us here,
Towns with each name I told you: say, they touch
The sea, and the sea them, and all is said,
So sleeps and sets to slumber that broad blue!
The people are as peaceful as the place.
This, that I call "the path" is road, highway;
But has there passed us by a market-cart,
Man, woman, child, or dog to wag a tail?
True, I saw weeders stooping in a field;
But—formidably white the Cap's extent!

Round again! Come, appearance promises!
The boundary, the park-wall, ancient brick,
Upholds a second wall of tree-heads high
Which overlean its top, a solid green.
That surely ought to shut in mysteries!
A jeweller—no unsuggestive craft!
Trade that admits of much romance, indeed.
For, whom but goldsmiths used old monarchs pledge
Regalia to, or seek a ransom from,
Or pray to furnish dowry, at a pinch,
According to authentic story-books?

[2] Striped like a scallop-shell.

Why, such have revolutionized this land
With diamond-necklace-dealing! not to speak
Of families turned upside-down, because
The gay wives went and pawned clandestinely
Jewels, and figured, till found out, with paste,
Or else redeemed them—how, is horrible!
Then there are those enormous criminals
That love their ware and cannot lose their love,
And murder you to get your purchase back.
Others go courting after such a stone,
Make it their mistress, marry for their wife,
And find out, some day, it was false the while,
As ever wife or mistress, man too fond
Has named his Pilgrim, Hermit, Ace of Hearts.

Beside—what style of edifice begins
To grow in sight at last and top the scene?
That grey roof, with the range of *lucarnes*,[1] four
I count, and that erection in the midst—
Clock-house, or chapel-spire, or what, above?
Conventual, that, beyond manorial, sure!
And reason good; for Clairvaux, such its name,
Was built of old to be a Priory,
Dependence on that Abbey-for-the-Males
Our Conqueror founded in world-famous Caen,
And where his body sought the sepulture
It was not to retain: you know the tale.
Such Priory was Clairvaux, prosperous
Hundreds of years; but nothing lasts below,
And when the Red Cap pushed the Crown aside,
The Priory became, like all its peers,
A National Domain: which, bought and sold
And resold, needs must change, with ownership,
Both outside show and inside use; at length
The messuage, three-and-twenty years ago,
Became the purchase of rewarded worth
Impersonate in Father—I must stoop
To French phrase for precision's sake, I fear—
Father Miranda, goldsmith of renown:

[1] Roof windows.

By birth a Madrilene,[2] by domicile
And sojourning accepted French at last.
His energy it was which, trade transferred
To Paris, throve as with a golden thumb,
Established in the Place Vendôme. He bought
Not building only, but belongings far
And wide, at Gonthier there, Monlieu, Villeneuve,
A plentiful estate: which, twelve years since,
Passed, at the good man's natural demise,
To Son and Heir Miranda—Clairvaux here,
The Paris shop, the mansion—not to say
Palatial residence on Quai Rousseau,
With money, moveables, a mine of wealth—
And young Léonce Miranda got it all.

Ah, but—whose might the transformation be?
Were you prepared for this, now? As we talked,
We walked, we entered the half-privacy,
The partly-guarded precinct: passed beside
The little paled-off islet, trees and turf,
Then found us in the main ash-avenue
Under the blessing of its branchage-roof.
Till, on emergence, what affronts our gaze?
Priory—Conqueror—Abbey-for-the-Males—
Hey, presto, pass, who conjured all away?
Look through the railwork of the gate: a park
—Yes, but *à l'Anglaise*, as they compliment!
Grass like green velvet, gravel-walks like gold,
Bosses of shrubs, embosomings of flowers,
Lead you—through sprinkled trees of tiny breed
Disporting, within reach of coverture,
By some habitual acquiescent oak
Or elm, that thinks, and lets the youngsters laugh—
Lead, lift at last your soul that walks the air,
Up to the house-front, or its back perhaps—
Whether façade or no, one coquetry
Of coloured brick and carved stone! Stucco? Well,
The daintiness is cheery, that I know,
And all the sportive floral framework fits
The lightsome purpose of the architect.

[2] Of Madrid.

Those *lucarnes* which I called conventual, late,
Those are the outlets in the *mansarde*-roof;[1]
And, underneath, what long light elegance
Of windows here suggests how brave inside
Lurk eyeballed gems they play the eyelids to!
Festive arrangements look through such, be sure!
And now the tower a-top, I took for clock's
Or bell's abode, turns out a quaint device,
Pillared and temple-treated Belvedere—
Pavilion safe within its railed-about
Sublimity of area—whence what stretch
Of sea and land, throughout the seasons' change,
Must greet the solitary! Or suppose
—If what the husband likes, the wife likes too—
The happy pair of students cloistered high,
Alone in April kiss when Spring arrives!
Or no, he mounts there by himself to meet
Winds, welcome wafts of sea-smell, first white bird
That flaps thus far to taste the land again,
And all the promise of the youthful year;
Then he descends, unbosoms straight his store
Of blessings in the bud, and both embrace,
Husband and wife, since earth is Paradise,
And man at peace with God. You see it all?

Let us complete our survey, go right round
The place: for here, it may be, we surprise
The Priory,—these solid walls, big barns,
Grey orchard-grounds, huge four-square stores for stock,
Betoken where the Church was busy once.
Soon must we come upon the Chapel's self.
No doubt next turn will treat us to . . . Aha,
Again our expectation proves at fault!
Still the bright graceful modern—not to say
Modish adornment, meets us: *Parc Anglais*,
Tree-sprinkle, shrub-embossment as before.
See, the sun splits on yonder bauble world
Of silvered glass concentring, every side,
All the adjacent wonder, made minute
And touched grotesque by ball-convexity!

[1] High French roof with rooms in it, first used in the Louvre. Mansard was an architect, died 1666.

Just so, a sense that something is amiss,
Something is out of sorts in the display,
Affects us, past denial, everywhere.
The right erection for the Fields, the Wood,
(Fields—but *Elysées*, wood—but *de Boulogne*)
Is peradventure wrong for wood and fields
When Vire, not Paris, plays the Capital.

So may a good man have deficient taste;
Since Son and Heir Miranda, he it was
Who, six years now elapsed, achieved the work
And truly made a wilderness to smile.
Here did their domesticity reside,
A happy husband and as happy wife,
Till . . . how can I in conscience longer keep
My little secret that the man is dead
I, for artistic purpose, talk about
As if he lived still? No, these two years now,
Has he been dead. You ought to sympathize,
Not mock the sturdy effort to redeem
My pledge, and wring you out some tragedy
From even such a perfect commonplace!
Suppose I boast the death of such desert
My tragic bit of Red? Who contravenes
Assertion that a tragedy exists
In any stoppage of benevolence,
Utility, devotion above all?
Benevolent? There never was his like:
For poverty, he had an open hand
. . . Or stop—I use the wrong expression here—
An open purse, then, ever at appeal;
So that the unreflecting rather taxed
Profusion than penuriousness in alms.
One, in his day and generation, deemed
Of use to the community? I trust
Clairvaux thus renovated, regalized,
Paris expounded thus to Normandy,
Answers that question. Was the man devout?
After a life—one mere munificence
To Church and all things churchly, men or mice,—
Dying, his last bequeathment gave land, goods,
Cash, every stick and stiver, to the Church,
And notably to that church yonder, that
Beloved of his soul, La Ravissante—

Wherefrom, the latest of his gifts, the Stone
Gratefully bore me as on arrow-flash
To Clairvaux, as I told you.

"Ay, to find
Your Red desiderated article,
Where every scratch and scrape provokes my White
To all the more superb a prominence!
Why, 'tis the story served up fresh again—
How it befell the restive prophet old
Who came and tried to curse, but blessed the land.
Come, your last chance! he disinherited
Children: he made his widow mourn too much
By this endowment of the other Bride—
Nor understood that gold and jewelry
Adorn her in a figure, not a fact.
You make that White, I want, so very white,
'Tis I say now—some trace of Red should be
Somewhere in this Miranda-sanctitude!"

Not here, at all events, sweet mocking friend!
For he was childless; and what heirs he had
Were an uncertain sort of Cousinry
Scarce claiming kindred so as to withhold
The donor's purpose though fantastical:
Heirs, for that matter, wanting no increase
Of wealth, since rich already as himself;
Heirs that had taken trouble off his hands,
Bought that productive goldsmith-business he,
With abnegation wise as rare, renounced
Precisely at a time of life when youth,
Nigh on departure, bids mid-age discard
Life's other loves and likings in a pack,
To keep, in lucre, comfort worth them all.
This Cousinry are they who boast the shop
Of "Firm-Miranda, London and New-York."
Cousins are an unconscionable kind;
But these—pretension surely on their part
To share inheritance were too absurd!

"Remains then, he dealt wrongly by his wife,
Despoiled her somehow by such testament?"
Farther than ever from the mark, fair friend!
The man's love for his wife exceeded bounds
Rather than failed the limit. 'Twas to live
Hers and hers only, to abolish earth
Outside—since Paris holds the pick of earth—
He turned his back, shut eyes, stopped ears to all
Delicious Paris tempts her children with,
And fled away to this far solitude—
She peopling solitude sufficiently!
She, partner in each heavenward flight sublime,
Was, with each condescension to the ground,
Duly associate also: hand in hand,
. . . Or side by side, I say by preference—
On every good work sidelingly they went.
Hers was the instigation—none but she
Willed that, if death should summon first her lord,
Though she, sad relict, must drag residue
Of days encumbered by this load of wealth—
(Submitted to with something of a grace
So long as her surviving vigilance
Might worthily administer, convert
Wealth to God's glory and the good of man,
Give, as in life, so now in death, effect
To cherished purpose)—yet she begged and prayed
That, when no longer she could supervise
The House, it should become a Hospital:
For the support whereof, lands, goods and cash
Alike will go, in happy guardianship,
To yonder church, La Ravissante: who debt
To God and man undoubtedly will pay.

"Not of the world, your heroine!"

Do you know
I saw her yesterday—set eyes upon
The veritable personage, no dream?
I in the morning strolled this way, as oft,
And stood at entry of the avenue.
When, out from that first garden-gate, we gazed
Upon and through, a small procession swept—
Madame Miranda with attendants five.
First, of herself: she wore a soft and white
Engaging dress, with velvet stripes and squares
Severely black, yet scarce discouraging:
Fresh Paris-manufacture! (Vire's would do?
I doubt it, but confess my ignorance.)
Her figure? somewhat small and darlinglike.
Her face? well, singularly colourless,

For first thing: which scarce suits a blonde,
you know.
Pretty you would not call her: though perhaps
Attaining to the ends of prettiness
And somewhat more, suppose enough of soul.
Then she is forty full: you cannot judge
What beauty was her portion at eighteen,
The age she married at. So, colourless
I stick to, and if featureless I add,
Your notion grows completer: for, although
I noticed that her nose was aquiline,
The whole effect amounts with me to—blank!
I never saw what I could less describe.
The eyes, for instance, unforgettable
Which ought to be, are out of mind as sight.

Yet is there not conceivably a face,
A set of wax-like features, blank at first,
Which, as you bendingly grow warm above,
Begins to take impressment from your breath?
Which, as your will itself were plastic here
Nor needed exercise of handicraft,
From formless moulds itself to correspond
With all you think and feel and are—in fine
Grows a new revelation of yourself,
Who know now for the first time what you
want?
Here has been something that could wait
awhile,
Learn your requirement, nor take shape before,
But, by adopting it, make palpable
Your right to an importance of your own,
Companions somehow were so slow to see!
—Far delicater solace to conceit
Than should some absolute and final face,
Fit representative of soul inside,
Summon you to surrender—in no way
Your breath's impressment, nor, in stranger's
guise,
Yourself—or why of force to challenge you?
Why should your soul's reflection rule your
soul?
("You" means not you, nor me, nor anyone
Framed, for a reason I shall keep suppressed,
To rather want a master than a slave:
The slavish still aspires to dominate!)
So, all I say is, that the face, to me
One blur of blank, might flash significance
To who had seen his soul reflected there
By that symmetric silvery phantom-like
Figure, with other five processional.
The first, a black-dressed matron—maybe,
maid—
Mature, and dragonish of aspect,—marched;
Then four came tripping in a joyous flock,
Two giant goats and two prodigious sheep
Pure as the arctic fox that suits the snow
Tripped, trotted, turned the march to merriment,
But ambled at their mistress' heel—for why?
A rod of guidance marked the *Châtelaine*,
And ever and anon would sceptre wave,
And silky subject leave meandering.
Nay, one great naked sheep-face stopped to
ask
Who was the stranger, snuffed inquisitive
My hand that made acquaintance with its nose,
Examined why the hand—of man at least—
Patted so lightly, warmly, so like life!
Are they such silly natures after all?
And thus accompanied, the paled-off space,
Isleted shrubs and verdure, gained the group;
Till, as I gave a furtive glance, and saw
Her back-hair was a block of solid gold,
The gate shut out my harmless question—Hair
So young and yellow, crowning sanctity,
And claiming solitude . . . can hair be false?

"Shut in the hair and with it your last hope
Yellow might on inspection pass for Red!—
Red, Red, where is the tinge of promised Red
In this old tale of town and country life,
This rise and progress of a family?
First comes the bustling man of enterprise,
The fortune-founding father, rightly rough,
As who must grub and grab, play pioneer.
Then, with a light and airy step, succeeds
The son, surveys the fabric of his sire
And enters home, unsmirched from top to toe.
Polish and education qualify
Their fortunate possessor to confine
His occupancy to the first-floor suite
Rather than keep exploring needlessly
Where dwelt his sire content with cellarage:
Industry bustles underneath, no doubt,
And supervisors should not sit too close.

Next, rooms built, there's the furniture to buy,
And what adornment like a worthy wife?
In comes she like some foreign cabinet,
Purchased indeed, but purifying quick
What space receives it from all traffic-taint.
She tells of other habits, palace-life;
Royalty may have pried into those depths
Of sandal-wooded drawer, and set a-creak
That pygmy portal pranked with lazuli.
More fit by far the ignoble we replace
By objects suited to such visitant
Than that we desecrate her dignity
By neighbourhood of vulgar table, chair,
Which haply helped old age to smoke and doze.
The end is, an exchange of city-stir
And too intrusive burgess-fellowship,
For rural isolated elegance,
Careless simplicity, how preferable!
There one may fairly throw behind one's back
The used-up worn-out Past, we want away,
And make a fresh beginning of stale life.
'In just the place'—does anyone object?—
'Where aboriginal gentility
Will scout the upstart, twit him with each trick
Of townish trade-mark that stamps word and deed,
And most of all resent that here town-dross
He daubs with money-colour to deceive!'
Rashly objected! Is there not the Church
To intercede and bring benefic truce
At outset? She it is shall equalize
The labourers i' the vineyard, last as first.
Pay court to her, she stops impertinence.
'Duke, once your sires crusaded it, we know:
Our friend the newcomer observes, no less,
Your chapel, rich with their emblazonry,
Wants roofing—might he but supply the means!
Marquise, you gave the honour of your name,
Titular patronage, abundant will
To what should be an Orphan Institute:
Gave everything but funds, in brief; and these,
Our friend, the lady newly resident,
Proposes to contribute, by your leave!'
Brothers and sisters lie they in thy lap,
Thou none-excluding, all-collecting Church!
Sure, one has half a foot i' the hierarchy
Of birth, when 'Nay, my dear,' laughs out the Duke,
'I'm the crown's cushion-carrier, but the crown—
Who gave its central glory, I or you?'
When Marquise jokes 'My quest, forsooth? Each doit
I scrape together goes for Peter-pence
To purvey bread and water in his bonds
For Peter's self imprisoned—Lord, how long?
Yours, yours alone the bounty, dear my dame,
You plumped the purse which, poured into the plate,
Made the Archbishop open brows so broad!
And if you really mean to give that length
Of lovely lace to edge the robe!' . . . Ah, friends,
Gem better serves so than by calling crowd
Round shop-front to admire the million's-worth!
Lace gets more homage than from *lorgnette*-stare,
And comment coarse to match, (should one display
One's robe a trifle o'er the *baignoire*-edge,)[1]
'Well may she line her slippers with the like,
If minded so! their shop it was produced
That wonderful *parure*,[2] the other day,
Whereof the Baron said it beggared him.'
And so the paired Mirandas built their house,
Enjoyed their fortune, sighed for family,
Found friends would serve their purpose quite as well,
And come, at need, from Paris—anyhow,
With evident alacrity, from Vire—
Endeavour at the chase, at least succeed
In smoking, eating, drinking, laughing, and
Preferring country, oh so much to town!
Thus lived the husband; though his wife would sigh
In confidence, when Countesses were kind,
'Cut off from Paris and society!'
White, White, I once more round you in the ears!
Though you have marked it, in a corner, yours

[1] Box in theatre.
[2] Set of jewels.

Henceforth,—Red-lettered 'Failure' very plain,
I shall acknowledge, on the snowy hem
Of ordinary Night-cap! Come, enough!
We have gone round its cotton vastitude,
Or half-round, for the end's consistent still,
A *cul-de-sac* with stoppage at the sea.
Here we return upon our steps. One look
May bid good morning—properly good night—
To civic bliss, Miranda and his mate!
Are we to rise and go?"

No, sit and stay!
Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw
Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.
Don't the rings shriek an ominous "Ha! ha!
So you take Human Nature upon trust?"
List but with like trust to an incident
Which speedily shall make quite Red enough
Burn out of yonder spotless napery!
Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize
The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,
One laugh of colour and embellishment!
Because it was there,—past those laurustines,[1]
On that smooth gravel-sweep 'twixt flowers and sward,—
There tragic death befell; and not one grace
Outspread before you but is registered
In that sinistrous coil these last two years
Were occupied in winding smooth again.

"True?" Well, at least it was concluded so,
Sworn to be truth, allowed by Law as such
(With my concurrence, if it matter here)
A month ago: at Vire they tried the case.

II.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, then, . . . but stay!
Permit me a preliminary word,
And, after, all shall go so straight to end!

Have you, the travelled lady, found yourself
Inside a ruin, fane or bath or cirque,
Renowned in story, dear through youthful dream?
If not,—imagination serves as well.
Try fancy-land, go back a thousand years,
Or forward, half the number, and confront
Some work of art gnawn hollow by Time's tooth,—
Hellenic temple, Roman theatre,
Gothic cathedral, Gallic Tuileries,
But ruined, one and whichsoe'er you like.
Obstructions choke what still remains intact,
Yet proffer change that's picturesque in turn;
Since little life begins where great life ends,
And vegetation soon amalgamates,
Smooths novel shape from out the shapeless old,
Till broken column, battered cornice block
The centre with a bulk half weeds and flowers,
Half relics you devoutly recognize.
Devoutly recognizing,—hark, a voice
Not to be disregarded! "Man worked here
Once on a time; here needs again to work;
Ruins obstruct, which man must remedy."
Would you demur "Let Time fulfil his task,
And, till the scythe-sweep find no obstacle,
Let man be patient"?

The reply were prompt:
"Glisteningly beneath the May-night moon,
Herbage and floral coverture bedeck
Yon splintered mass amidst the solitude:
Wolves occupy the background, or some snake
Glides by at distance; picturesque enough!
Therefore, preserve it? Nay, pour daylight in,—
The mound proves swarming with humanity.
There never was a thorough solitude,
Now you look nearer: mortal busy life
First of all brought the crumblings down on pate,
Which trip man's foot still, plague his passage much,
And prove—what seems to you so picturesque
To him is . . . but experiment yourself
On how conducive to a happy home
Will be the circumstance your bed for base

[1] Laurels.

Boasts tessellated pavement,—equally
Affected by the scorpion for his nest,—
While what o'erroofs bed is an architrave,
Marble, and not unlikely to crush man
To mummy, should its venerable prop,
Some fig-tree-stump, play traitor underneath.
Be wise! Decide! For conservation's sake,
Clear the arena forthwith! lest the tread
Of too-much-tried impatience trample out
Solid and unsubstantial to one blank
Mud-mixture, picturesque to nobody,—
And, task done, quarrel with the parts intact
Whence came the filtered fine dust, whence the crash
Bides but its time to follow. Quick conclude
Removal, time effects so tardily,
Of what is plain obstruction; rubbish cleared,
Let partial-ruin stand while ruin may,
And serve world's use, since use is manifold.
Repair wreck, stanchion[1] wall to heart's content,
But never think of renovation pure
And simple, which involves creation too.
Transform and welcome! Yon tall tower may help
(Though built to be a belfry and nought else)
Some Father Secchi[2] to tick Venus off
In transit: never bring there bell again,
To damage him aloft, brain us below,
When new vibrations bury both in brick!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, furnishing
The application at his cost, poor soul!
Was instanced how,—because the world lay strewn
With ravage of opinions in his path,
And neither he, nor any friendly wit,
Knew and could teach him which was firm, which frail,
In his adventure to walk straight through life
The partial-ruin,—in such enterprise,
He straggled into rubbish, struggled on,
And stumbled out again observably.
"Yon buttress still can back me up," he judged:
And at a touch down came both he and it.

[1] Prop.
[2] The famous astronomer.

"A certain statue, I was warned against,
Now, by good fortune, lies well under foot,
And cannot tempt to folly any more:"
So, lifting eye, aloft since safety lay,
What did he light on? the Idalian shape,
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!
"These steps ascend the labyrinthine stair
Whence, darkling and on all-fours, out I stand
Exalt and safe, and bid low earth adieu—
For so instructs 'Advice to who would climb:'"
And all at once the climbing landed him
—Where, is my story.

Take its moral first.
Do you advise a climber? Have respect
To the poor head, with more or less of brains
To spill, should breakage follow your advice!
Head-break to him will be heart-break to you
For having preached "Disturb no ruins here!
Are not they crumbling of their own accord?
Meantime, let poets, painters keep a prize!
Beside, a sage pedestrian picks his way."
A sage pedestrian—such as you and I!
What if there trip, in merry carelessness,
And come to grief, a weak and foolish child?
Be cautious how you counsel climbing, then!

Are you adventurous and climb yourself?
Plant the foot warily, accept a staff,
Stamp only where you probe the standing-point,
Move forward, well assured that move you may:
Where you mistrust advance, stop short, there stick!
This makes advancing slow and difficult?
Hear what comes of the endeavour of brisk youth
To foot it fast and easy! Keep this same
Notion of outside mound and inside mash,
Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,
Symbolic partial-ravage,—keep in mind!
Here fortune placed his feet who first of all
Found no incumbrance, till head found . . .
But hear!

This son and heir then of the jeweller,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, at his birth,
Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood
With answerable gush, his mother's gift,
Of spirit, French and critical and cold.
Such mixture makes a battle in the brain,
Ending as faith or doubt gets uppermost;
Then will has way a moment, but no more:
So nicely-balanced are the adverse strengths,
That victory entails reverse next time.
The tactics of the two are different
And equalize the odds: for blood comes first,
Surrounding life with undisputed faith.
But presently, a new antagonist,
By scarce-suspected passage in the dark,
Steals spirit, fingers at each crevice found
Athwart faith's stronghold, fronts the astonished man:
"Such pains to keep me far, yet here stand I,
Your doubt inside the faith-defence of you!"

With faith it was friends bulwarked him about
From infancy to boyhood; so, by youth,
He stood impenetrably circuited,
Heaven-high and low as hell: what lacked he thus,
Guarded against aggression, storm or sap?
What foe would dare approach? Historic Doubt?
Ay, were there some half-knowledge to attack!
Batter doubt's best, sheer ignorance will beat.
Acumen metaphysic?—drills its way
Through what, I wonder! A thick feather-bed
Of thoughtlessness, no operating tool—
Framed to transpierce the flint-stone—fumbles at,
With chance of finding an impediment!
This Ravissante, now: when he saw the church
For the first time, and to his dying-day,
His firm belief was that the name fell fit
From the Delivering Virgin, niched and known;
As if there wanted records to attest
The appellation was a pleasantry,
A pious rendering of Rare Vissante,
The proper name which erst our province bore.
He would have told you that Saint Aldabert
Founded the church, (Heaven early favoured France,)
About the second century from Christ;
Though the true man was Bishop of Raimbaux,
Eleventh in succession, Eldobert,
Who flourished after some six hundred years.
He it was brought the image "from afar,"
(Made out of stone the place produces still)
"Infantine Art divinely artless," (Art
In the decrepitude of Decadence,)
And set it up a-working miracles
Until the Northmen's fury laid it low,
Not long, however: an egregious sheep,
Zealous with scratching hoof and routing horn,
Unearthed the image in good Mailleville's time,
Count of the country. "If the tale be false,
Why stands it carved above the portal plain?"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda used to ask.
To Londres went the prize in solemn pomp,
But, liking old abode and loathing new,
Was borne—this time, by angels—back again.
And, reinaugurated, miracle
Succeeded miracle, a lengthy list,
Until indeed the culmination came—
Archbishop Chaumont prayed a prayer and vowed
A vow—gained prayer and paid vow properly—
For the conversion of Prince Vertgalant.
These facts, sucked in along with mother's-milk,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would dispute
As soon as that his hands were flesh and bone,
Milk-nourished two-and-twenty years before.
So fortified by blind Castilian blood,
What say you to the chances of French cold
Critical spirit, should Voltaire besiege
"Alp, Apennine, and fortified redoubt"?
Ay, would such spirit please to play faith's game
Faith's way, attack where faith defends so well!
But then it shifts, tries other strategy.

Coldness grows warmth, the critical becomes
Unquestioning acceptance. "Share and share
Alike in facts, to truth add other truth!
Why with old truth needs new truth disagree?"

Thus doubt was found invading faith, this time,
By help of not the spirit but the flesh:
Fat Rabelais chuckled, where faith lay in wait
For lean Voltaire's grimace—French, either foe.
Accordingly, while round about our friend
Ran faith without a break which learned eye
Could find at two-and-twenty years of age,
The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep soon
Assured itself there spread a standing-space
Flowery and comfortable, nowise rock
Nor pebble-pavement roughed for champion's tread
Who scorns discomfort, pacing at his post.
Tall, long-limbed, shoulder right and shoulder left,
And 'twixt *acromia*[1] such a latitude,
Black heaps of hair on head, and blacker bush
O'er-rioting chin, cheek and throat and chest,—
His brown meridional temperament
Told him—or rather pricked into his sense
Plainer than language—"Pleasant station here!
Youth, strength, and lustihood can sleep on turf
Yet pace the stony platform afterward:
First signal of a foe and up they start!
Saint Eldobert, at all such vanity,
Nay—sinfulness, had shaken head austere.
Had he? But did Prince Vertgalant? And yet,
After how long a slumber, of what sort,
Was it, he stretched octogenary joints
And, nigh on Day-of-Judgment trumpet-blast,
Jumped up and manned wall, brisk as any bee?"

Nor Rabelais nor Voltaire, but Sganarelle,[2]
You comprehend, was pushing through the chink!

[1] Shoulder-blades. [2] See Molière.

That stager in the saint's correct costume,
Who ever has his speech in readiness
For thickhead juvenility at fault:
"Go pace yon platform and play sentinel!
You won't? The worse! but still a worse might hap.
Stay then, provided that you keep in sight
The battlement, one bold leap lands you by!
Resolve not desperately 'Wall or turf,
Choose this, choose that, but no alternative!'
No! Earth left once were left for good and all:
'With Heaven you may accommodate yourself.'"

Saint Eldobert—I much approve his mode;
With sinner Vertgalant I sympathize;
But histrionic Sganarelle, who prompts
While pulling back, refuses yet concedes,—
Whether he preach in chair, or print in book,
Or whisper due sustainment to weak flesh,
Counting his sham beads threaded on a lie—
Surely, one should bid pack that mountebank!
Surely, he must have momentary fits
Of self-sufficient stage-forgetfulness,
Escapings of the actor-lassitude
When he allows the grace to show the grin,
Which ought to let even thickheads recognize
(Through all the busy and benefic part,—
Bridge-building, or rock-riving, or good clean
Transport of church and congregation both
From this to that place with no harm at all,)
The Devil, that old stager, at his trick
Of general utility, who leads
Downward, perhaps, but fiddles all the way!

Therefore, no sooner does our candidate
For saintship spotlessly emerge soul-cleansed
From First Communion to mount guard at post,
Paris-proof, top to toe, than up there starts
The Spirit of the Boulevard—you know Who—
With jocund "So, a structure fixed as fate,
Faith's tower joins on to tower, no ring more round,
Full fifty years at distance, too, from youth!
Once reach that precinct and there fight your best,

As looking back you wonder what has come
Of daisy-dappled turf you danced across!
Few flowers that played with youth shall pester age,
However age esteem the courtesy;
And Eldobert was something past his prime,
Stocked Caen with churches ere he tried hand here.
Saint-Sauveur, Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre, Saint-Jean
Attest his handiwork commenced betimes.
He probably would preach that turf is mud.
Suppose it mud, through mud one picks a way,
And when, clay-clogged, the struggler steps to stone,
He uncakes shoe, arrives in manlier guise
Than carried pick-a-back by Eldobert
Big-baby-fashion, lest his leathers leak!
All that parade about Prince Vertgalant
Amounts to—your Castilian helps enough—
Inveni ovem quæ perierat:
But ask the pretty votive statue-thing
What the lost sheep's meantime amusements were
Till the Archbishop found him! That stays blank:
They washed the fleece well and forgot the rest.
Make haste, since time flies, to determine, though!"

Thus opportunely took up parable,—
Admonishing Miranda just emerged
Pure from The Ravissante and Paris-proof,—
Saint Sganarelle: then slipped aside, changed mask,
And made re-entry as a gentleman
Born of the Boulevard, with another speech
I spare you.

So, the year or two revolved,
And ever the young man was dutiful
To altar and to hearth: had confidence
In the whole Ravissantish history.
Voltaire? Who ought to know so much of him,—
Old sciolist, whom only boys think sage,—
As one whose father's house upon the Quai
Neighboured the very house where that Voltaire
Died mad and raving, not without a burst
Of squibs and crackers too significant?
Father and mother hailed their best of sons,
Type of obedience, domesticity,
Never such an example inside doors!
Outside, as well not keep too close a watch;
Youth must be left to some discretion there.
And what discretion proved, I find deposed
At Vire, confirmed by his own words: to wit,
How, with the sprightliness of twenty-five,
Five—and not twenty, for he gave their names
With laudable precision—were the few
Appointed by him unto mistress-ship;
While, meritoriously the whole long week
A votary of commerce only, week
Ended, "at shut of shop on Saturday,
Do I, as is my wont, get drunk," he writes
In airy record to a confidant.
"Bragging and lies!" replied the apologist:
"And do I lose by that?" laughed Somebody
At the Court-edge a-tiptoe, mid the crowd,
In his own clothes, a-listening to men's Law.

Thus while, prospectively a combatant,
The volunteer bent brows, clenched jaws, and fierce
Whistled the march-tune "Warrior to the wall!"
Something like flowery laughters round his feet
Tangled him of a sudden with "Sleep first!"
And fairly flat upon the turf sprawled he
And let strange creatures make his mouth their home.
Anyhow, 'tis the nature of the soul
To seek a show of durability,
Nor, changing, plainly be the slave of change.
Outside the turf, the towers: but, round the turf,
A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,
Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place:
Tent which, while screening jollity inside
From the external circuit—evermore
A menace to who lags when he should march—
Yet stands a-tremble, ready to collapse
At touch of foot: turf is acknowledged grass,
And grass, though pillowy, held contemptible

Compared with solid rock, the rampired ridge.
To truth a pretty homage thus we pay
By testifying—what we dally with,
Falsehood, (which, never fear we take for truth !)
We may enjoy, but then—how we despise !

Accordingly, on weighty business bound,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda stooped to play,
But, with experience, soon reduced the game
To principles, and thenceforth played by rule:
Rule, dignifying sport as sport, proclaimed
No less that sport was sport and nothing more.
He understood the worth of womankind,—
To furnish man—provisionally—sport:
Sport transitive—such earth'samusementsare:
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite.
And since the serious work of life were wronged
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase. We have to spend
An hour—they want a lifetime thrown away:
We seek to tickle sense—they ask for soul,
As if soul had no higher ends to serve !
A stag-hunt gives the royal creature law
Bat-fowling is all fair with birds at roost,
The lantern and the clapnet suit the hedge.
Which must explain why, bent on Boulevard game,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda decently
Was prudent in his pleasure—passed himself
Off on the fragile fair about his path
As the gay devil rich in mere good looks,
Youth, hope—what matter though the purse be void ?
"If I were only young Miranda, now,
Instead of a poor clerkly drudge at desk
All day, poor artist vainly bruising brush
On palette, poor musician scraping gut
With horsehair teased that no harmonics come!
Then would I love with liberality,
Then would I pay !—who now shall be repaid,
Repaid alike for present pain and past,
If Mademoiselle permit the contre-danse,
Sing 'Gay in garret youth at twenty lives,'
And afterward accept a lemonade !"

Such sweet facilities of intercourse
Afford the Winter-Garden and Mabille !
"Oh, I unite"—runs on the confidence,
Poor fellow, that was read in open Court,
—"Amusement with discretion : never fear
My *escapades* cost more than market-price !
No durably-attached Miranda-dupe,
Sucked dry of substance by two clinging lips,
Promising marriage, and performing it !
Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,
And know where duty takes me—in good time !"

Thus fortified and realistic, then,
At all points thus against illusion armed,
He wisely did New Year inaugurate
By playing truant to the favoured five :
And sat installed at "The Varieties,"—
Playhouse appropriately named,—to note
(Prying amid the turf that's flowery there)
What primrose, firstling of the year, might push
The snows aside to deck his button-hole—
Unnoticed by that outline sad, severe,
(Though fifty good long years removed from youth)
That tower and tower,—our image, bear in mind !

No sooner was he seated than, behold,
Out burst a polyanthus ! He was 'ware
Of a young woman niched in neighbourhood ;
And ere one moment flitted, fast was he
Found captive to the beauty evermore,
For life, for death, for heaven, for hell, her own.
Philosophy, bewail thy fate ! Adieu,
Youth realistic and illusion-proof !
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—hero late
Who "understood the worth of womankind,"
"Who found therein — provisionally — sport,"—
Felt, in the flitting of a moment, fool
Was he, and folly all that seemed so wise,
And the best proof of wisdom's birth would be
That he made all endeavour, body, soul,
By any means, at any sacrifice

Of labour, wealth, repute, and (—well, the time
For choosing between heaven on earth, and heaven
In heaven, was not at hand immediately—)
Made all endeavour, without loss incurred
Of one least minute, to obtain her love.
"Sport transitive?" "Variety required?"
"In loving were a lifetime thrown away?"
How singularly may young men mistake!
The fault must be repaired with energy.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda ate her up
With eye-devouring; when the unconscious fair
Passed from the close-packed hall, he pressed behind;
She mounted vehicle, he did the same,
Coach stopped, and cab fast followed, at one door—
Good house in unexceptionable street.
Out stepped the lady,—never think, alone!
A mother was not wanting to the maid,
Or, may be, wife, or widow, might one say?
Out stepped and properly down flung himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda at her feet—
And never left them after, so to speak,
For twenty years, till his last hour of life,
When he released them, as precipitate.
Love proffered and accepted then and there!
Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean: this love was true,
And the rest happened by due consequence.
By which we are to learn that there exists
A falsish false, for truth's inside the same,
And truth that's only half true, falsish truth.
The better for both parties! folk may taunt
That half your rock-built wall is rubble-heap:
Answer them, half their flowery turf is stones!
Our friend had hitherto been decking coat
If not with stones, with weeds that stones befit,
With dandelions—"primrose-buds," smirked he;
This proved a polyanthus on his breast,
Prize-lawful or prize-lawless, flower the same.
So with his other instance of mistake:
Was Christianity the Ravissante?
And what a flower of flowers he chanced on now!
To primrose, polyanthus I prefer
As illustration, from the fancy-fact
That out of simple came the composite
By culture: that the florist bedded thick
His primrose-root in ruddle,[1] bullock's blood,
Ochre and devils'-dung, for aught I know,
Until the pale and pure grew fiery-fine,
Ruby and topaz, rightly named anew.
This lady was no product of the plain;
Social manure had raised a rarity.
Clara de Millefleurs (note the happy name)
Blazed in the full-blown glory of her Spring.
Peerlessly perfect, form and face: for both—
"Imagine what, at seventeen, may have proved
Miss Pages, the actress: Pages herself, my dear!"
Noble she was, the name denotes: and rich?
"The apartment in this Coliseum Street,
Furnished, my dear, with such an elegance,
Testifies wealth, my dear, sufficiently!
What quality, what style and title, eh?
Well now, waive nonsense, you and I are boys
No longer: somewhere must a screw be slack!
Don't fancy, Duchesses descend at door
From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched,
And bid him take heart, and deliver mind,
March in and make himself at ease forthwith,—
However broad his chest and black his beard,
And comely his belongings,—all through love
Protested in a world of ways save one
Hinting at marriage!"—marriage which yet means
Only the obvious method, easiest help
To satisfaction of love's first demand,
That love endure eternally: "my dear,
Somewhere or other must a screw be slack!"

Truth is the proper policy: from truth—
Whate'er the force wherewith you fling your speech,—

[1] Red earth or chalk.

Be sure that speech will lift you, by rebound,
Somewhere above the lowness of a lie!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda heard too true
A tale—perhaps I may subjoin, too trite!
As the meek martyr takes her statued stand
Above our pity, claims our worship just
Because of what she puts in evidence,
Signal of suffering, badge of torture borne
In days gone by, shame then but glory now,
Barb, in the breast, turned aureole for the front!
So, half timidity, composure half,
Clara de Millefleurs told her martyrdom.

Of poor though noble parentage, deprived
Too early of a father's guardianship,
What wonder if the prodigality
Of nature in the girl, whose mental gifts
Matched her external dowry, form and face—
If these suggested a too prompt resource
To the resourceless mother? "Try the Stage
And so escape starvation! Prejudice
Defames Mimetic Art: be yours to prove
That gold and dross may meet and never mix,
Purity plunge in pitch yet soil no plume!"

All was prepared in London—(you conceive
The natural shrinking from publicity
In Paris, where the name excites remark)
London was ready for the grand *début;*
When some perverse ill-fortune, incident
To art mimetic, some malicious thrust
Of Jealousy who sidles 'twixt the scenes
Or pops up sudden from the prompter's hole,—
Somehow the brilliant bubble bursts in suds.
Want followed: in a foreign land, the pair!
O hurry over the catastrophe—
Mother too sorely tempted, daughter tried
Scarcely so much as circumvented, say!
Caged unsuspecting artless innocence!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda tell the rest!—
The rather that he told it in a style
To puzzle Court Guide students, much more me.
"Brief, she became the favourite of Lord N.,
An aged but illustrious Duke, thereby
Breaking the heart of his competitor
The Prince of O. Behold her palaced straight
In splendour, clothed in diamonds" (phrase how fit!),
"Giving tone to the City by the Thames!
Lord N., the aged but illustrious Duke,
Was even on the point of wedding her,
Giving his name to her" (why not to us?)
"But that her better angel interposed.
She fled from such a fate to Paris back,
A fortnight since: conceive Lord N.'s despair!
Duke as he is, there's no invading France.
He must restrict pursuit to postal plague
Of writing letters daily, duly read
As darlingly she hands them to myself,
The privileged supplanter, who therewith
Light a cigar and see abundant blue"—
(Either of heaven or else Havanna-smoke.)
"Think! she, who helped herself to diamonds late,
In passion of disinterestedness
Now—will accept no tribute of my love
Beyond a paltry ring, three Louis'-worth!
Little she knows I have the rummaging
Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme!"
So wrote entrancedly to confidant
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. Surely now,
If Heaven, that sees all, understands no less,
It finds temptation pardonable here,
It mitigates the promised punishment,
It recognizes that to tarry just
An April hour amid such dainty turf
Means no rebellion against task imposed
Of journey to the distant wall one day?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda puts the case!
Love, he is purposed to renounce, abjure;
But meanwhile, is the case a common one?
Is it the vulgar sin, none hates as he?
Which question, put directly to "his dear"
(His brother—I will tell you in a trice)
Was doubtless meant, by due meandering,
To reach, to fall not unobserved before
The auditory cavern 'neath the cope
Of Her, the placable, the Ravissante.
But here's the drawback, that the image smiles,
Smiles on, smiles ever, says to supplicant
"Ay, ay, ay"—like some kindly weathercock

Which, stuck fast at Set Fair, Favonian Breeze,[1]
Still warrants you from rain, though Auster's lead
Bring down the sky above your cloakless mirth.
Had he proposed this question to, nor "dear"
Nor Ravissante, but prompt to the Police.
The Commissary of his Quarter, now—
There had been shaggy eyebrows elevate
With twinkling apprehension in each orb
Beneath, and when the sudden shut of mouth
Relaxed,—lip pressing lip, lest out should plump
The pride of knowledge in too frank a flow,—
Then, fact on fact forthcoming, dose were dealt
Of truth remedial in sufficiency
To save a chicken threatened with the pip,
Head-staggers and a tumble from its perch.

Alack, it was the lady's self that made
The revelation, after certain days
—Nor so unwisely! As the haschisch-man
Prepares a novice to receive his drug,
Adroitly hides the soil with sudden spread
Of carpet ere he seats his customer:
Then shows him how to smoke himself about
With Paradise; and only when, at puff
Of pipe, the Houri dances round the brain
Of dreamer, does he judge no need is now
For circumspection and punctiliousness;
He may resume the serviceable scrap
That made the votary unaware of muck.
Just thus the lady, when her brewage—love—
Was well a-fume about the novice-brain,
Saw she might boldly pluck from underneath
Her lover the preliminary lie.

Clara de Millefleurs, of the noble race,
Was Lucie Steiner, child to Dominique
And Magdalen Commercy; born at Sierck,
About the bottom of the Social Couch.
The father having come and gone again,
The mother and the daughter found their way
To Paris, and professed mode-merchandize,
Were milliners, we English roughlier say;
And soon a fellow-lodger in the house,

[1] West wind.

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, young and smart,
Tailor by trade, perceived his housemate's youth,
Smartness, and beauty over and above.
Courtship was brief, and marriage followed quick,
And quicklier—impecuniosity.
The young pair quitted Paris to reside
At London: which repaid the compliment
But scurvily, since not a whit the more
Trade prospered by the Thames than by the Seine.
Failing all other, as a last resource,
"He would have trafficked in his wife,"—she said.
If for that cause they quarrelled, 'twas, I fear,
Rather from reclamation of her rights
To wifely independence, than as wronged
Otherwise by the course of life proposed:
Since, on escape to Paris back again
From horror and the husband,—ill-exchanged
For safe maternal home recovered thus,—
I find her domiciled and dominant
In that apartment, Coliseum Street,
Where all the splendid magic met and mazed
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's venturous eye.
Only, the same was furnished at the cost
Of someone notable in days long since,
Carlino Centofanti: he it was
Found entertaining unawares—if not
An angel, yet a youth in search of one.
Why this revealment after reticence?
Wherefore, beginning "Millefleurs," end at all
Steiner, Muhlhausen, and the ugly rest?
Because the unsocial purse-comptrolling wight,
Carlino Centofanti,—made aware
By misadventure that his bounty, crumbs
From table, comforted a visitant,—
Took churlish leave, and left, too, debts to pay.
Loaded with debts, the lady needs must bring
Her soul to bear assistance from a friend
Beside that paltry ring, three Louis'-worth;
And therefore might the little circumstance
That Monsieur Léonce had the rummaging

Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme
Pass, perhaps, not so unobservably.

Frail shadow of a woman in the flesh,
These very eyes of mine saw yesterday,
Would I re-tell this story of your woes,
Would I have heart to do you detriment
By pinning all this shame and sorrow plain
To that poor *chignon*,—staying with me still,
Though form and face have well-nigh faded now,—
But that men read it, rough in brutal print,
As two years since some functionary's voice
Rattled all this—and more by very much—
Into the ear of vulgar Court and crowd?
Whence, by reverberation, rumblings grew
To what had proved a week-long roar in France,
Had not the dreadful cannonry drowned all.
Was, now, the answer of your advocate
More than just this? "The shame fell long ago,
The sorrow keeps increasing: God forbid
We judge man by the faults of youth in age!"
Permit me the expression of a hope
Your youth proceeded like your avenue,
Stepping by bush, and tree, and taller tree,
Until, columnar, at the house they end.
So might your creeping youth columnar rise
And reach, by year and year, symmetrical,
To where all shade stops short, shade's service done.
Bushes on either side, and boughs above,
Darken, deform the path else sun would streak;
And, cornered half-way somewhere, I suspect
Stagnation and a horse-pond: hurry past!
For here's the house, the happy half-and-half
Existence—such as stands for happiness
True and entire, howe'er the squeamish talk!
Twenty years long, you may have loved this man;
He must have loved you; that's a pleasant life,
Whatever was your right to lead the same.
The white domestic pigeon pairs secure,
Nay, does mere duty by bestowing egg
In authorized compartment, warm and safe,
Boarding about, and gilded spire above,
Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair!
But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs
On tree-top, every straw a thievery,
Where the wild dove—despite the fowler's snare,
The sportsman's shot, the urchin's stone,—crooned gay,
And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,
Nor minded a malignant world below.
I throw first stone forsooth? 'Tis mere assault
Of playful sugarplum against your cheek,
Which, if it makes cheek tingle, wipes off rouge!
You, my worst woman? Ah, that touches pride,
Puts on his mettle the exhibitor
Of Night-caps, if you taunt him "This, no doubt,—
Now we have got to Female-garniture,—
Crowns your collection, Reddest of the row!"
O unimaginative ignorance
Of what dye's depth keeps best apart from worst
In womankind!—how heaven's own pure may seem
To blush aurorally beside such blanched
Divineness as the women-wreaths named White:
While hell, eruptive and fuliginous,
Sickens to very pallor as I point
Her place to a Red clout called woman too!
Hail, heads that ever had such glory once
Touch you a moment, like God's cloven tongues
Of fire! your lambent aureoles lost may leave
You marked yet, dear beyond true diadems:
And hold, each foot, nor spurn, to man's disgrace,
What other twist of fetid rag may fall!
Let slink into the sewer the cupping-cloth!

Lucie, much solaced, I re-finger you,
The medium article; if ruddy-marked
With iron-mould, your cambric,—clean at least
From poison-speck of rot and purulence.
Lucie Muhlhausen said—"Such thing am I:
Love me, or love me not!" Miranda said

"I do love, more than ever, most for this."
The revelation of the very truth
Proved the concluding necessary shake
Which bids the tardy mixture crystallize
Or else stay ever liquid: shoot up shaft,
Durably diamond, or evaporate—
Sluggish solution through a minute's slip.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took his soul
In both his hands, as if it were a vase,
To see what came of the convulsion there,
And found, amid subsidence, love new-born
So sparklingly resplendent, old was new.
"Whatever be my lady's present, past,
Or future, this is certain of my soul,
I love her: in despite of all I know,
Defiance of the much I have to fear,
I venture happiness on what I hope,
And love her from this day for evermore:
No prejudice to old profound respect
For certain Powers! I trust they bear in mind
A most peculiar case, and straighten out
What's crooked there, before we close accounts.
Renounce the world for them—some day I will:
Meantime, to me let her become the world!"

Thus mutely might our friend soliloquize
Over the tradesmen's bills, his Clara's gift—
In the apartment, Coliseum Street,
Carlino Centofanti's legacy,
Provided rent and taxes were discharged—
In face of Steiner now, De Millefleurs once,
The tailor's wife and runaway confessed.

On such a lady if election light,
(According to a social prejudice)
If henceforth "all the world" she constitute
For any lover,—needs must he renounce
Our world in ordinary, walked about
By couples loving as its laws prescribe,—
Renunciation sometimes difficult.
But, in this instance, time and place and thing
Combined to simplify experiment,
And make Miranda, in the current phrase,
Master the situation passably.

For first facility, his brother died—
Who was, I should have told you, confidant,
Adviser, referee and substitute,
All from a distance: but I knew how soon
This younger brother, lost in Portugal,
Had to depart and leave our friend at large.
Cut off abruptly from companionship
With brother-soul of bulk about as big,
(Obvious recipient—by intelligence
And sympathy, poor little pair of souls—
Of much affection and some foolishness)
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, meant to lean
By nature, needs must shift the leaning-place
To his love's bosom from his brother's neck,
Or fall flat unrelieved of freight sublime.

Next died the lord of the Aladdin's cave,
Master o' the mint and keeper of the keys
Of chests chokeful with gold and silver changed
By Art to forms where wealth forgot itself,
And caskets where reposed each pullet-egg
Of diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants.
In short, the father of the family
Took his departure also from our scene,
Leaving a fat succession to his heir
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—"fortunate
If ever man was, in a father's death,"
(So commented the world,—not he, too kind,
Could that be, rather than scarce kind enough)
Indisputably fortunate so far,
That little of incumbrance in his path,
Which money kicks aside, would lie there long.

And finally, a rough but wholesome shock,
An accident which comes to kill or cure,
A jerk which mends a dislocated joint!
Such happy chance, at cost of twinge, no doubt,
Into the socket back again put truth,
And stopped the limb from longer dragging lie.
For love suggested "Better shamble on,
And bear your lameness with what grace you may!"
And but for this rude wholesome accident,

Continuance of disguise and subterfuge,
Retention of first falsehood as to name
And nature in the lady, might have proved
Too necessary for abandonment.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably
Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,
So politic, so self-preservative,
Therefore so pardonable—though so wrong!
For see the bugbear in the background! Breathe
But ugly name, and wind is sure to waft
The husband news of the wife's whereabout:
From where he lies perdue in London town,
Forth steps the needy tailor on the stage,
Deity-like from dusk machine of fog,
And claims his consort, or his consort's worth
In rubies which her price is far above.
Hard to propitiate, harder to oppose,—
Who but the man's self came to banish fear,
A pleasant apparition, such as shocks
A moment, tells a tale, then goes for good!

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen proved no less
Nor more than "Gustave," lodging opposite
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's diamond-cave
And ruby-mine, and lacking little thence
Save that its gnome would keep the captive safe,
Never return his Clara to his arms.
For why? He was become the man in vogue,
The indispensable to who went clothed
Nor cared encounter Paris-fashion's blame,—
Such miracle could London absence work.
Rolling in riches—so translate "the vogue"—
Rather his object was to keep off claw
Should griffin scent the gold, should wife lay claim
To lawful portion at a future day,
Than tempt his partner from her private spoils.
Best forage each for each, nor coupled hunt!

Pursuantly, one morning,—knock at door
With knuckle, dry authoritative cough,
And easy stamp of foot, broke startlingly
On household slumber, Coliseum Street:
"Admittance in the name of Law!" In marched
The Commissary and subordinate.
One glance sufficed them. "A marital pair:
We certify, and bid good morning, sir!
Madame, a thousand pardons!" Whereupon
Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, otherwise
Called "Gustave" for conveniency of trade,
Deposing in due form complaint of wrong,
Made his demand of remedy—divorce
From bed, board, share of name, and part in goods.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda owned his fault,
Protested his pure ignorance, from first
To last, of rights infringed in "Gustave's" case:
Submitted him to judgment. Law decreed
"Body and goods be henceforth separate!"
And thereupon each party took its way,
This right, this left, rejoicing, to abide
Estranged yet amicable, opposites
In life as in respective dwelling-place.
Still does one read on his establishment
Huge-lettered "Gustave,"—gold out-glittering
"Miranda, goldsmith," just across the street—
"A first-rate hand at riding-habits"—say
The instructed—"special cut of chamber-robes."

Thus by a rude in seeming—rightlier judged
Beneficent surprise, publicity
Stopped further fear and trembling, and what tale
Cowardice thinks a covert: one bold splash
Into the mid-shame, and the shiver ends,
Though cramp and drowning may begin perhaps.

To cite just one more point which crowned success:
Madame, Miranda's mother, most of all
An obstacle to his projected life
In licence, as a daughter of the Church,
Duteous, exemplary, severe by right—
Moreover one most thoroughly beloved
Without a rival till the other sort
Possessed her son,—first storm of anger spent,
She seemed, though grumblingly and grudgingly,

To let be what needs must be, acquiesce.
"With Heaven—accommodation possible!"
Saint Sganarelle had preached with such effect,
She saw now mitigating circumstance.
"The erring one was most unfortunate,
No question: but worse Magdalens repent.
Were Clara free, did only Law allow,
What fitter choice in marriage could have made
Léonce or anybody?" 'Tis alleged
And evidenced, I find, by advocate
"Never did she consider such a tie
As baleful, springe to snap whate'er the cost."
And when the couple were in safety once
At Clairvaux, motherly, considerate,
She shrank not from advice. "Since safe you be,
Safely abide! for winter, I know well,
Is troublesome in a cold country-house.
I recommend the south room, that we styled,
Your sire and I, the winter-chamber."

Chance
Or purpose,—who can read the mystery?—
Combined, I say, to bid "Entrench yourself,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, on this turf,
About this flower, so firmly that, as tent
Rises on every side around you both,
The question shall become,—Which arrogates
Stability, this tent or those far towers?
May not the temporary structure suit
The stable circuit, co-exist in peace?—
Always until the proper time, no fear!
'Lay flat your tent!' is easier said than done."

So, with the best of auspices, betook
Themselves Léonce Miranda and his bride—
Provisionary—to their Clairvaux house,
Never to leave it—till the proper time.

I told you what was Clairvaux-Priory
Ere the improper time: an old demesne
With memories,—relic half, and ruin whole,—
The very place, then, to repair the wits
Worn out with Paris-traffic, when its lord,
Miranda's father, took his month of ease
Purchased by industry. What contrast here!
Repose, and solitude, and healthy ways.
That ticking at the back of head, he took
For motion of an inmate, stopped at once,
Proved nothing but the pavement's rattle left
Behind at Paris: here was holiday.
Welcome the quaint succeeding to the spruce,
The large and lumbersome and—might he breathe
In whisper to his own ear—dignified
And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep!
Palatial gloomy chambers for parade,
And passage-lengths of lost significance,
Never constructed as receptacle,
At his odd hours, for him their actual lord
By dint of diamond-dealing, goldsmithry.
Therefore Miranda's father chopped and changed
Nor roof-tile nor yet floor-brick, undismayed
By rains a-top or rats at bottom there.
Such contrast is so piquant for a month!
But now arrived quite other occupants
Whose cry was "Permanency,—life and death
Here, here, not elsewhere, change is all we dread!"
Their dwelling-place must be adapted, then,
To inmates, no mere truants from the town,
No temporary sojourners, forsooth,
At Clairvaux: change it into Paradise!

Fair friend,—who listen and let talk, alas!—
You would, in even such a state of things,
Pronounce,—or am I wrong?—for bidding stay
The old-world inconvenience, fresh as found.
All folk of individuality
Prefer to be reminded now and then,
Though at the cost of vulgar cosiness,
That the shell-outside only harbours man
The vital and progressive, meant to build,
When build he may, with quite a difference,
Some time, in that far land we dream about,
Where every man is his own architect.
But then the couple here in question, each
At one in project for a happy life,
Were by no acceptation of the word
So individual that they must aspire
To architecture all-appropriate
And, therefore, in this world impossible:

They needed house to suit the circumstance,
Proprietors, not tenants for a term.
Despite a certain marking, here and there,
Of fleecy black or white distinguishment,
These vulgar sheep wore the flock's uniform.
They love the country, *they* renounce the town?
They gave a kick, as our Italians say,
To Paris ere it turned and kicked themselves!
Acquaintances might prove too hard to seek,
Or the reverse of hard to find, perchance,
Since Monsieur Gustave's apparition there.
And let me call remark upon the list
Of notabilities invoked, in Court
At Vire, to witness, by their phrases culled
From correspondence, what was the esteem
Of those we pay respect to, for "the pair
Whereof they knew the inner life," 'tis said.
Three, and three only, answered the appeal.
First, Monsieur Vaillant, music-publisher,
"Begs Madame will accept civilities."
Next, Alexandre Dumas,—sire, not son,—
"Sends compliments to Madame and to you."
And last—but now prepare for England's voice!
I will not mar nor make—here's word for word—
"A rich proprietor of Paris, he
To whom belonged that beauteous *Bagatelle*
Close to the wood of Boulogne, Hertford hight,
Assures of homages and compliments
Affectionate"—not now Miranda but
"Madame Muhlhausen." (Was this friend, the Duke
Redoubtable in rivalry before?)
Such was the evidence when evidence
Was wanted, then if ever, to the worth
Whereat acquaintances in Paris prized
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's household charm.
No wonder, then, his impulse was to live,
In Norman solitude, the Paris life:
Surround himself with Art transported thence,
And nature like those famed Elysian Fields:
Then, warm up the right colour out of both,
By Boulevard friendships tempted to come taste
How Paris lived again in little there.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda practised Art.
Do let a man for once live as man likes!
Politics? Spend your life, to spare the world's:
Improve each unit by some particle
Of joy the more, deteriorate the orb
Entire, your own: poor profit, dismal loss!
Write books, paint pictures, or make music—since
Your nature leans to such life-exercise!
Ay, but such exercise begins too soon,
Concludes too late, demands life whole and sole
Artistry being battle with the age
It lives in! Half life,—silence, while you learn
What has been done; the other half,—attempt
At speech, amid world's wail of wonderment—
"Here's something done was never done before!"
To be the very breath that moves the age
Means not to have breath drive you bubble-like
Before it—but yourself to blow: that's strain;
Strain's worry through the life-time, till there's peace;
We know where peace expects the artist-soul.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much.
Therefore in Art he nowise cared to be
Creative; but creation, that had birth
In storminess long years before was born
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—Art, enjoyed
Like fleshly objects of the chace that tempt
In cookery, not in capture—these might feast
The dilettante, furnish tavern-fare
Open to all with purses open too.
To sit free and take tribute *seigneur*-like—
Now, not too lavish of acknowledgment,
Now, self-indulgently profuse of pay,
Always Art's *seigneur*, not Art's serving-man
Whate'er the style and title and degree,—
That is the quiet life and easy death
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would approve
Wholly—provided (back I go again
To the first simile) that while glasses clink,

And viands steam, and banqueting laughs high,
All that's outside the temporary tent,
The dim grim outline of the circuit-wall,
Forgets to menace "Soon or late will drop
Pavilion, soon or late you needs must march,
And laggards will be sorry they were slack!
Always—unless excuse sound plausible!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much:
Whence his determination just to paint
So creditably as might help the eye
To comprehend how painter's eye grew dim
Ere it produced L'Ingegno's[1] piece of work—
So to become musician that his ear
Should judge, by its own tickling and turmoil,
Who made the Solemn Mass might well die deaf—
So cultivate a literary knack
That, by experience how it wiles the time,
He might imagine how a poet, rapt
In rhyming wholly, grew so poor at last
By carelessness about his banker's-book,
That the Sieur Boileau (to provoke our smile)
Began abruptly,—when he paid devoir
To Louis Quatorze as he dined in state,—
"Sire, send a drop of broth to Pierre Corneille
Now dying and in want of sustenance!"
—I say, these half-hour playings at life's toil,
Diversified by billiards, riding, sport—
With now and then a visitor—Dumas,
Hertford—to check no aspiration's flight—
While Clara, like a diamond in the dark,
Should extract shining from what else were shade,
And multiply chance rays a million-fold,—
How could he doubt that all offence outside,—
Wrong to the towers, which, pillowed on the turf,
He thus shut eyes to,—were as good as gone?

So, down went Clairvaux-Priory to dust,
And up there rose, in lieu, yon structure gay
Above the Norman ghosts: and where the stretch
Of barren country girdled house about,

[1] Genius.

Behold the Park, the English preference!
Thus made undoubtedly a desert smile
Monsieur Léonce Miranda.

Ay, but she?
One should not so merge soul in soul, you think?
And I think: only, let us wait, nor want
Two things at once—her turn will come in time.
A cork-float danced upon the tide, we saw,
This morning, blinding-bright with briny dews:
There was no disengaging soaked from sound,
Earth-product from the sister-element.
But when we turn, the tide will turn, I think,
And bare on beach will lie exposed the buoy:
A very proper time to try, with foot
And even finger, which was buoying wave,
Which merely buoyant substance,—power to lift,
And power to be sent skyward passively.
Meanwhile, no separation of the pair!

III.

And so slipt pleasantly away five years
Of Paradisiac dream; till, as there flit
Premonitory symptoms, pricks of pain,
Because the dreamer has to start awake
And find disease dwelt active all the while
In head or stomach through his night-long sleep,—
So happened here disturbance to content.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's last of cares,
Ere he composed himself, had been to make
Provision that, while sleeping safe he lay,
Somebody else should, dragon-like, let fall
Never a lid, coiled round the apple-stem,
But watch the precious fruitage. Somebody
Kept shop, in short, played Paris-substitute.
Himself, shrewd, well-trained, early-exercised,
Could take in, at an eye-glance, luck or loss—
Know commerce throve, though lazily uplift
On elbow merely: leave his bed, forsooth?
Such active service was the substitute's.

But one October morning, at first drop
Of appled gold, first summons to be grave
Because rough Autumn's play turns earnest now,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda was required
In Paris to take counsel, face to face,
With Madame-mother: and be rated, too,
Roundly at certain items of expense
Whereat the government provisional,
The Paris substitute and shopkeeper,
Shook head, and talked of funds inadequate:
Oh, in the long run,—not if remedy
Occurred betimes! Else,—tap the generous bole
Too near the quick,—it withers to the root—
Leafy, prolific, golden apple-tree,
"Miranda," sturdy in the Place Vendôme!

"What is this reckless life you lead?" began
Her greeting she whom most he feared and loved,
Madame Miranda. "Luxury, extravagance
Sardanapalus' self might emulate,—
Did your good father's money go for this?
Where are the fruits of education, where
The morals which at first distinguished you,
The faith which promised to adorn your age?
And why such wastefulness outbreaking now,
When heretofore you loved economy?
Explain this pulling-down and building-up
Poor Clairvaux, which your father bought because
Clairvaux he found it, and so left to you,
Not a gilt-gingerbread big baby-house!
True, we could somehow shake head and shut eye
To what was past prevention on our part—
This reprehensible illicit bond:
We, in a manner, winking, watched consort
Our modest well-conducted pious son
With Dalilah: we thought the smoking flax
Would smoulder soon away and end in snuff.
Is spark to strengthen, prove consuming fire?
No lawful family calls Clairvaux 'home'—
Why play that fool of Scripture whom the voice
Admonished 'Whose to-night shall be those things
Provided for thy morning jollity?
To take one specimen of pure caprice
Out of the heap conspicuous in the plan,—
Puzzle of change, I call it,—titled big
'Clairvaux Restored:' what means this Belvedere?
This Tower, stuck like a fool's-cap on the roof—
Do you intend to soar to heaven from thence?
Tower, truly! Better had you planted turf—
More fitly would you dig yourself a hole
Beneath it for the final journey's help!
O we poor parents—could we prophesy!"
Léonce was found affectionate enough
To man, to woman, child, bird, beast, alike;
But all affection, all one fire of heart
Flaming toward Madame-mother. Had she posed
The question plainly at the outset "Choose!
Cut clean in half your all-the-world of love,
The mother and the mistress: then resolve,
Take me or take her, throw away the one!"—
He might have made the choice and marred my tale.
But, much I apprehend, the problem put
Was "Keep both halves, yet do no detriment
To either! Prize each opposite in turn!"
Hence, while he prized at worth the Clairvaux-life
With all its tolerated naughtiness,
He, visiting in fancy Quai Rousseau,
Saw, cornered in the cosiest nook of all
That range of rooms through number Thirty-three,
The lady-mother bent o'er her *bézique;*
While Monsieur Curé This, and Sister That—
Superior of no matter what good House—
Did duty for Duke Hertford and Dumas,
Nay—at his mother's age—for Clara's self.
At Quai Rousseau, things comfortable thus,
Why should poor Clairvaux prove so troublesome?
She played at cards, he built a Belvedere.
But here's the difference: she had reached the Towers
And there took pastime: he was still on Turf—

Though fully minded that, when once he marched,
No sportive fancy should distract him more.

In brief, the man was angry with himself,
With her, with all the world and much beside:
And so the unseemly words were interchanged
Which crystallize what else evaporates,
And make mere misty petulance grow hard
And sharp inside each softness, heart and soul.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda flung at last
Out of doors, fever-flushed: and there the Seine
Rolled at his feet, obsequious remedy
For fever, in a cold Autumnal flow.
"Go and be rid of memory in a bath!"
Craftily whispered Who besets the ear
On such occasions.

Done as soon as dreamed.
Back shivers poor Léonce to bed—where else?
And there he lies a month 'twixt life and death,
Raving. "Remorse of conscience!" friends opine.
"Sirs, it may partly prove so," represents
Beaumont—(the family physician, he
Whom last year's Commune murdered, do you mind?)
Beaumont reports "There is some active cause,
More than mere pungency of quarrel past,—
Cause that keeps adding other food to fire.
I hear the words and know the signs, I say!
Dear Madame, you have read the Book of Saints,
How Antony was tempted? As for me,
Poor heathen, 'tis by pictures I am taught.
I say then, I see standing here,—between
Me and my patient, and that crucifix
You very properly would interpose,—
A certain woman-shape, one white appeal
'Will you leave me, then, me, me, me for her?'
Since cold Seine could not quench this flame, since flare
Of fever does not redden it away,—
Be rational, indulgent, mute—should chance
Come to the rescue—Providence, I mean—
The while I blister and phlebotomize!"

Well, somehow rescued by whatever power,
At month's end, back again conveyed himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags,
Nay, tinder: stuff irreparably spoiled,
Though kindly hand should stitch and patch its best.
Clairvaux in Autumn is restorative.
A friend stitched on, patched ever. All the same,
Clairvaux looked greyer than a month ago.
Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified
Each copse, so wealthy once; the garden-plots,
The orchard-walks showed dearth and dreariness.
The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud
Into a leaden wedge; and sorrowful
Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.
Nobody came so far from Paris now:
Friends did their duty by an invalid
Whose convalescence claimed entire repose.
Only a single ministrant was staunch
At quiet reparation of the stuff—
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags:
But she was Clara and the world beside.

Another month, the year packed up his plagues
And sullenly departed, pedlar-like,
As apprehensive old-world ware might show
To disadvantage when the new-comer,
Merchant of novelties, young 'Sixty-eight,
With brand-new bargains, whistled o'er the lea.
Things brightened somewhat o'er the Christmas hearth,
As Clara plied assiduously her task.

"Words are but words and wind. Why let the wind
Sing in your ear, bite, sounding, to your brain?
Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course!
Age quarrels because spring puts forth a leaf
While winter has a mind that boughs stay bare;
Or rather—worse than quarrel—age descries

Propriety in preaching life to death.
'Enjoy nor youth, nor Clairvaux, nor poor me?'
Dear Madame, you enjoy your age, 'tis thought!
Your number Thirty-three on Quai Rousseau
Cost fifty times the price of Clairvaux, tipped
Even with our prodigious Belvedere;
You entertain the Curé,—we, Dumas:
We play charades, while you prefer *bézique:*
Do lead your own life and let ours alone!
Cross Old Year shall have done his worst, my friend!
Here comes gay New Year with a gift, no doubt.
Look up and let in light that longs to shine—
One flash of light, and where will darkness hide?
Your cold makes me too cold, love! Keep me warm!"

Whereat Léonce Miranda raised his head
From his two white thin hands, and forced a smile,
And spoke: "I do look up, and see your light
Above me! Let New Year contribute warmth—
I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze."
Nor did he. Three days after, just a spark
From Paris, answered by a snap at Caen
Or whither reached the telegraphic wire:
"Quickly to Paris! On arrival, learn
Why you are wanted!" Curt and critical!

Off starts Léonce, one fear from head to foot;
Caen, Rouen, Paris, as the railway helps;
Then come the Quai and Number Thirty-three.
"What is the matter, concierge?"—a grimace!
He mounts the staircase, makes for the main seat
Of dreadful mystery which draws him there—
Bursts in upon a bedroom known too well—
There lies all left now of the mother once.
Tapers define the stretch of rigid white,
Nor want there ghastly velvets of the grave.
A blackness sits on either side at watch,
Sisters, good souls but frightful all the same,
Silent: a priest is spokesman for his corpse.
"Dead, through Léonce Miranda! stricken down
Without a minute's warning, yesterday!
What did she say to you, and you to her,
Two months ago? This is the consequence!
The doctors have their name for the disease;
I, you, and God say—heart-break, nothing more!"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, like a stone
Fell at the bedfoot and found respite so,
While the priest went to tell the company.
What follows you are free to disbelieve.
It may be true or false that this good priest
Had taken his instructions,—who shall blame?—
From quite another quarter than, perchance,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might suppose
Would offer solace in such pressing need.
All he remembered of his kith and kin
Was they were worthily his substitutes
In commerce, did their work and drew their pay.
But *they* remembered, in addition, this—
They fairly might expect inheritance,
As nearest kin, called Family by law
And gospel both. Now, since Miranda's life
Showed nothing like abatement of distaste
For conjugality, but preference
Continued and confirmed of that smooth chain
Which slips and leaves no knot behind, no heir—
Presumption was, the man, become mature,
Would at a calculable day discard
His old and outworn . . . what we blush to name,
And make society the just amends;
Scarce by a new attachment—Heaven forbid!
Still less by lawful marriage: that's reserved
For those who make a proper choice at first—
Not try both courses and would grasp in age
The very treasure youth preferred to spurn.
No! putting decently such thought aside,
The penitent must rather give his powers
To such a reparation of the past

As, edifying kindred, makes them rich.
Now, how would it enrich prospectively
The Cousins, if he lavished such expense
On Clairvaux?—pretty as a toy, but then
As toy, so much productive and no more!
If all the outcome of the goldsmith's shop
Went to gild Clairvaux, where remain the funds
For Cousinry to spread out lap and take?
This must be thought of and provided for.
I give it you as mere conjecture, mind!
To help explain the wholesome unannounced
Intelligence, the shock that startled guilt,
The scenic show, much yellow, black and white
By taper-shine, the nuns—portentous pair,
And, more than all, the priest's admonishment—
"No flattery of self! You murdered her!
The grey lips, silent now, reprove by mine.
You wasted all your living, rioted
In harlotry—she warned and I repeat!
No warning had she, for she needed none:
If this should be the last yourself receive?"
Done for the best, no doubt, though clumsily,—
Such, and so startling, the reception here,
You hardly wonder if down fell at once
The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical,
Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts;
Its cobweb-work, betinseled stitchery,
Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
And showed the outer towers distinct and dread.

Senseless he fell, and long he lay, and much
Seemed salutary in his punishment
To planners and performers of the piece.
When pain ends, pardon prompt may operate.
There was a good attendance close at hand,
Waiting the issue in the great saloon,
Cousins with consolation and advice.

All things thus happily performed to point,
No wonder at success commensurate.
Once swooning stopped, once anguish subsequent
Raved out,—a sudden resolution chilled
His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone,
As the poor fellow raised himself upright,
Collected strength, looked, once for all, his look,
Then, turning, put officious help aside
And passed from out the chamber. "For affairs!"
So he announced himself to the saloon:
"We owe a duty to the living too!"—
Monsieur Léonce Miranda tried to smile.
How did the hearts of Cousinry rejoice
At their stray sheep returning thus to fold,
As, with a dignity, precision, sense,
All unsuspected in the man before,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda made minute
Detail of his intended scheme of life
Thenceforward and for ever. "Vanity
Was ended: its redemption must begin—
And, certain, would continue; but since life
Was awfully uncertain—witness here!—
Behoved him lose no moment but discharge
Immediate burthen of the world's affairs
On backs that kindly volunteered to crouch.
Cousins, with easier conscience, blamelessly
Might carry on the goldsmith's trade, in brief,
Uninterfered with by its lord who late
Was used to supervise and take due tithe.
A stipend now sufficed his natural need:
Themselves should fix what sum allows man live.
But half a dozen words concisely plain
Might, first of all, make sure that, on demise,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's property
Passed by bequeathment, every particle,
To the right heirs, the cousins of his heart.
As for that woman—they would understand!
This was a step must take her by surprise.
It were too cruel did he snatch away
Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,
And . . . and attractive! Means must be supplied
To save her from herself, and from the world,
And . . . from anxieties might haunt him else
When he were fain have other thoughts in mind."

It was a sight to melt a stone, that thaw
Of rigid disapproval into dew
Of sympathy, as each extended palm
Of cousin hasted to enclose those five
Cold fingers, tendered so mistrustfully,
Despairingly of condonation now!
You would have thought,—at every fervent shake,
In reassurance of those timid tips,—
The penitent had squeezed, considerate,
By way of fee into physician's hand
For physicking his soul, some diamond knob.

And now let pass a week. Once more behold
The same assemblage in the same saloon,
Waiting the entry of protagonist
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. "Just a week
Since the death-day,—was ever man transformed
Like this man?" questioned cousin of his mate.
Last seal to the repentance had been set
Three days before, at Sceaux in neighbourhood
Of Paris, where they laid with funeral pomp
Mother by father. Let me spare the rest:
How the poor fellow, in his misery,
Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow
Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,
And there lay, till uprooted by main force
From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again
Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.
It is not with impunity priests teach
The doctrine he was dosed with from his youth—
"Pain to the body—profit to the soul;
Corporeal pleasure—so much woe to pay
When disembodied spirit gives account."
However, woe had done its worst, this time.
Three days allow subsidence of much grief.
Already, regular and equable,
Forward went purpose to effect. At once
The testament was written, signed and sealed.
Disposure of the commerce—that took time,
And would not suffer by a week's delay;
But the immediate, the imperious need,
The call demanding of the Cousinry
Co-operation, what convened them thus,
Was—how and when should deputation march
To Coliseum Street, the old abode
Of wickedness, and there acquaint — oh, shame!
Her, its old inmate, who had followed up
And lay in wait in the old haunt for prey—
That they had rescued, they possessed Léonce,
Whose loathing at recapture equalled theirs
Upbraid that sinner with her sinfulness,
Impart the fellow-sinner's firm resolve
Never to set eyes on her face again:
Then, after stipulations strict but just,
Hand her the first instalment,—moderate
Enough, no question,—of her salary:
Admonish for the future, and so end.—
All which good purposes, decided on
Sufficiently, were waiting full effect
When presently the culprit should appear.

Somehow appearance was delayed too long;
Chatting and chirping sunk inconsciously
To silence, nay, uneasiness, at length
Alarm, till—anything for certitude!—
A peeper was commissioned to explore,
At keyhole, what the laggard's task might be—
What caused so palpable a disrespect!

Back came the tiptoe cousin from his quest.
"Monsieur Léonce was busy," he believed,
"Contemplating—those love-letters, perhaps,
He always carried, as if precious stones,
About with him. He read, one after one,
Some sort of letters. But his back was turned.
The empty coffer open at his side,
He leant on elbow by the mantelpiece
Before the hearth-fire; big and blazing too."

"Better he shovelled them all in at once,
And burned the rubbish!" was a cousin's quip,
Warming his own hands at the fire the while.
I told you, snow had fallen outside, I think.

When suddenly a cry, a host of cries,
Screams, hubbub and confusion thrilled the room.
All by a common impulse rushed thence, reached

The late death-chamber, tricked with trappings still,
Skulls, cross-bones, and such moral broidery.
Madame Muhlhausen might have played the witch,
Dropped down the chimney and appalled Léonce
By some proposal "Parting touch of hand!"
If she but touched his foolish hand, you know!!

Something had happened quite contrariwise.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, one by one,
Had read the letters and the love they held,
And, that task finished, had required his soul
To answer frankly what the prospect seemed
Of his own love's departure—pledged to part!
Then, answer being unmistakable,
He had replaced the letters quietly,
Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side
By its convenient handle, plunged the whole—
Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,
Into the burning grate and held them there.
"Burn, burn and purify my past!" said he,
Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

In vain they pulled him from the torture-place:
The strong man, with the soul of tenfold strength,
Broke from their clutch: and there again smiled he,
The miserable hands re-bathed in fire—
Constant to that ejaculation "Burn,
Burn, purify!" And when, combining force,
They fairly dragged the victim out of reach
Of further harm, he had no hands to hurt—
Two horrible remains of right and left,
"Whereof the bones, phalanges formerly,
Carbonized, were still crackling with the flame,"
Said Beaumont. And he fought them all the while:
"Why am I hindered when I would be pure?
Why leave the sacrifice still incomplete?
She holds me, I must have more hands to burn!"
They were the stronger, though, and bound him fast.

Beaumont was in attendance presently.
"What did I tell you? Preachment to the deaf!
I wish he had been deafer when they preached,
Those priests! But wait till next Republic comes!"

As for Léonce, a single sentiment
Possessed his soul and occupied his tongue—
Absolute satisfaction at the deed.
Never he varied, 'tis observable,
Nor in the stage of agonies (which proved
Absent without leave,—science seemed to think)
Nor yet in those three months' febricity
Which followed,—never did he vary tale—
Remaining happy beyond utterance.
"Ineffable beatitude"—I quote
The words, I cannot give the smile—"such bliss
Abolished pain! Pain might or might not be:
He felt in heaven, where flesh desists to fret.
Purified now and henceforth, all the past
Reduced to ashes with the flesh defiled!
Why all those anxious faces round his bed?
What was to pity in their patient, pray,
When doctor came and went, and Cousins watched?
—Kindness, but in pure waste!" he said and smiled.
And if a trouble would at times disturb
The ambrosial mood, it came from other source
Than the corporeal transitory pang.
"If sacrifice be incomplete!" cried he—
"If ashes have not sunk reduced to dust,
To nullity! If atoms coalesce
Till something grow, grow, get to be a shape
I hate, I hoped to burn away from me!
She is my body, she and I are one,
Yet, all the same, there, there at bed-foot stands

The woman wound about my flesh and blood,
There, the arms open, the more wonderful,
The whiter for the burning . . . Vanish thou!
Avaunt, fiend's self found in the form I wore!"

"Whereat," said Beaumont, "since his hands were gone,
The patient in a frenzy kicked and licked
To keep off some imagined visitant.
So will it prove as long as priests may preach
Spiritual terrors!" groaned the evidence
Of Beaumont that his patient was stark mad—
Produced in time and place: of which anon.
"Mad, or why thus insensible to pain?
Body and soul are one thing, with two names
For more or less elaborated stuff."

Such is the new *Religio Medici*.
Though antiquated faith held otherwise,
Explained that body is not soul, but just
Soul's servant: that, if soul be satisfied,
Possess already joy or pain enough,
It uses to ignore, as master may,
What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings—
Superfluous contribution: soul, once served,
Has nought to do with body's service more.
Each, speculated on exclusively,
As if its office were the only one,
Body or soul, either shows service paid
In joy and pain, that's blind and objectless—
A servant's toiling for no master's good—
Or else shows good received and put to use,
As if within soul's self grew joy and pain,
Nor needed body for a ministrant.
I note these old unscientific ways:
Poor Beaumont cannot: for the Commune ruled
Next year, and ere they shot his priests, shot him.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda raved himself
To rest; lay three long months in bliss or bale,
Inactive, anyhow: more need that heirs,
His natural protectors, should assume
The management, bestir their cousinship,
And carry out that purpose of reform
Such tragic work now made imperative.
A deputation, with austerity,
Nay, sternness, bore her sentence to the fiend
Aforesaid,—she at watch for turn of wheel
And fortune's favour, Street—you know the name.
A certain roughness seemed appropriate:
"You—
Steiner, Muhlhausen, whatsoe'er your name,
Cause whole and sole of this catastrophe!"—
And so forth, introduced the embassage.

"Monsieur Léonce Miranda was divorced
Once and for ever from his—ugly word.
Himself had gone for good to Portugal:
They came empowered to act and stipulate.
Hold! no discussion! Terms were settled now:
So much of present and prospective pay,
But also—good engagement in plain terms
She never seek renewal of the past!"

This little harmless tale produced effect.
Madame Muhlhausen owned her sentence just,
Its execution gentle. "Stern their phrase,
These kinsfolk with a right she recognized—
But kind its import probably, which now
Her agitation, her bewilderment
Rendered too hard to understand, perhaps.
Let them accord the natural delay,
And she would ponder and decide. Meantime,
So far was she from wish to follow friend
Who fled her, that she would not budge from place—
Now that her friend was fled to Portugal,—
Never! *She* leave this Coliseum Street?
No, not a footstep!" she assured them.

So—
They saw they might have left that tale untold
When, after some weeks more were gone to waste,
Recovery seemed incontestable,
And the poor mutilated figure, once
The gay and glancing fortunate young spark,
Miranda, humble and obedient took
The doctor's counsel, issued sad and slow
From precincts of the sick-room, tottered down,

And out, and into carriage for fresh air,
And so drove straight to Coliseum Street,
And tottered upstairs, knocked, and in a trice
Was clasped in the embrace of whom you know—
With much asseveration, I omit,
Of constancy henceforth till life should end.
When all this happened,—"What reward," cried she,
"For judging her Miranda by herself!
For never having entertained a thought
Of breaking promise, leaving home forsooth,
To follow who was fled to Portugal!
As if she thought they spoke a word of truth!
She knew what love was, knew that he loved her;
The Cousinry knew nothing of the kind."

I will not scandalize you and recount
How matters made the morning pass away.
Not one reproach, not one acknowledgment,
One explanation: all was understood!
Matters at end, the home-uneasiness
Cousins were feeling at this jaunt prolonged
Was ended also by the entry of—
Not simply him whose exit had been made
By mild command of doctor "Out with you!
I warrant we receive another man!"
But—would that I could say, the married pair!
And, quite another man assuredly,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took on him
Forthwith to bid the trio, priest and nuns,
Constant in their attendance all this while,
Take his thanks and their own departure too;
Politely but emphatically. Next,
The Cousins were dismissed: "No protest, pray!
Whatever I engaged to do is done,
Or shall be—I but follow your advice:
Love I abjure: the lady, you behold,
Is changed as I myself; her sex is changed:
This is my Brother—He will tend me now,
Be all my world henceforth as brother should.
Gentlemen, of a kinship I revere,
Your interest in trade is laudable;
I purpose to indulge it: manage mine,
My goldsmith-business in the Place Vendôme,
Wholly—through purchase at the price adjudged
By experts I shall have assistance from.
If, in conformity with sage advice,
I leave a busy world of interests
I own myself unfit for—yours the care
That any world of other aims, wherein
I hope to dwell, be easy of access
Through ministration of the moneys due,
As we determine, with all proper speed,
Since I leave Paris to repair my health.
Say farewell to our Cousins, Brother mine!"

And, all submissiveness, as brother might,
The lady curtseyed gracefully, and dropt
More than mere curtsey, a concluding phrase
So silver-soft, yet penetrative too,
That none of it escaped the favoured ears:
"Had I but credited one syllable,
I should to-day be lying stretched on straw,
The produce of your miserable *rente!*
Whereas, I hold him—do you comprehend?"
Cousin regarded cousin, turned up eye,
And took departure, as our Tuscans laugh,
Each with his added palm-breadth of long nose,—
Curtailed but imperceptibly, next week,
When transfer was accomplished, and the trade
In Paris did indeed become their own,
But bought by them and sold by him on terms
'Twixt man and man,—might serve 'twixt wolf and wolf,
Substitute "bit and clawed" for "signed and sealed"—
Our ordinary business-terms, in short.
Another week, and Clairvaux broke in bloom
At end of April, to receive again
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, gentleman,
Ex-jeweller and goldsmith: never more,—
According to the purpose he professed,—
To quit this paradise, his property,
This Clara, his companion: so it proved.

The Cousins, each with elongated nose,
Discussed their bargain, reconciled them soon
To hard necessity, disbursed the cash,
And hastened to subjoin, wherever type
Proclaimed "Miranda" to the public, "Called

Now Firm-Miranda." There, a colony,
They flourish underneath the name that still
Maintains the old repute, I understand.
They built their Clairvaux, dream-Château, in Spain,
Perhaps—but Place Vendôme is waking worth:
Oh, they lost little !—only, man and man
Hardly conclude transactions of the kind
As cousin should with cousin,—cousins think.
For the rest, all was honourably done,
So, ere buds break to blossom, let us breathe !
Never suppose there was one particle
Of recrudescence—wound, half-healed before,
Set freshly running—sin, repressed as such,
New loosened as necessity of life !
In all this revocation and resolve,
Far be sin's self-indulgence from your thought !
The man had simply made discovery,
By process I respect if not admire,
That what was, was :—that turf, his feet had touched,
Felt solid just as much as yonder towers
He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon,
And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.
People had told him flowery turf was false
To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside :
That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride
Plants on safe platform and secures man rest."
That was untrue. Some varied the advice :
"Neither was solid, towers no more than turf."
Double assertion, therefore twice as false.
"I like these amateurs"—our friend had laughed,
Could he turn what he felt to what he thought,
And, that again, to what he put in words :
"I like their pretty trial, proof of paste
Or precious stone, by delicate approach
Of eye askance, fine feel of finger-tip,
Or touch of tongue inquisitive for cold.
I tried my jewels in a crucible :
Fierce fire has felt them, licked them, left them sound.
Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,
My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit !
Each may oppose each, yet be true alike !"

To build up, independent of the towers,
A durable pavilion o'er the turf,
Had issued in disaster. "What remained
Except, by tunnel, or else gallery,
To keep communication 'twixt the two,
Unite the opposites, both near and far,
And never try complete abandonment
Of one or other ?" so he thought, not said.
And to such engineering feat, I say,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda saw the means
Precisely in this revocation prompt
Of just those benefits of worldly wealth
Conferred upon his Cousinry—all but !

This Clairvaux—you would know, were you at top
Of yonder crowning grace, its Belvedere—
Is situate in one angle-niche of three
At equidistance from Saint-Rambert—there
Behind you, and The Ravissante, beside—
There : steeple, steeple, and this Clairvaux-top,
(A sort of steeple) constitute a trine,
With not a tenement to break each side,
Two miles or so in length, if eye can judge.
Now, this is native land of miracle.
O why, why, why, from all recorded time,
Was miracle not wrought once, only once,
To help whoever wanted help indeed ?
If on the day when Spring's green girlishness
Grew nubile and she trembled into May,
And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring
A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth,
Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue,
And all that new sun, that fresh hope about
His airy place of observation,—friend,
Feel with me that if just then, just for once,
Some angel,—such as the authentic pen
Yonder records a daily visitant
Of ploughman Claude, rheumatic in the joints,
And spinster Jeanne, with megrim troubled sore,—
If such an angel, with nought else to do,
Had taken station on the pinnacle
And simply said "Léonce, look straight before !
Neither to right hand nor to left : for why ?
Being a stupid soul, you want a guide

To turn the goodness in you to account
And make stupidity submit itself.
Go to Saint-Rambert! Straightway get such guide!
There stands a man of men. You, jeweller,
Must needs have heard how once the biggest block
Of diamond now in Europe lay exposed
Mid specimens of stone and earth and ore,
On huckster's stall, — Navona names the Square,
And Rome the city for the incident,—
Labelled 'quartz-crystal, price one halfpenny.'
Haste and secure that ha'p'worth, on your life!
That man will read you rightly head to foot,
Mark the brown face of you, the bushy beard,
The breadth 'twixt shoulderblades, and through each black
Castilian orbit, see into your soul.
Talk to him for five minutes—nonsense, sense,
No matter what—describe your horse, your hound,—
Give your opinion of the policy
Of Monsieur Rouher,—will he succour Rome?
Your estimate of what may outcome be
From Œcumenical Assemblage there!
After which samples of intelligence,
Rapidly run through those events you call
Your past life, tell what once you tried to do,
What you intend on doing this next May!
There he stands, reads an English newspaper,
Stock-still, and now, again upon the move,
Paces the beach to taste the Spring, like you,
Since both are human beings in God's eye.
He will have understood you, I engage.
Endeavour, for your part, to understand
He knows more, and loves better, than the world
That never heard his name, and never may.
He will have recognized, ere breath be spent
And speech at end, how much that's good in man,
And generous, and self-devoting, makes
Monsieur Léonce Miranda worth his help;
While sounding to the bottom ignorance
Historical and philosophical
And moral and religious, all one couch
Of crassitude, a portent of its kind.
Then, just as he would pityingly teach
Your body to repair maltreatment, give
Advice that you should make those stumps to stir
With artificial hands of caoutchouc,
So would he soon supply your crippled soul
With crutches, from his own intelligence,
Able to help you onward in the path
Of rectitude whereto your face is set,
And counsel justice—to yourself, the first,
To your associate, very like a wife
Or something better,—to the world at large,
Friends, strangers, horses, hounds and Cousinry—
All which amount of justice will include
Justice to God. Go and consult his voice!"
Since angel would not say this simple truth,
What hinders that my heart relieve itself,
Milsand, who makest warm my wintry world,
And wise my heaven, if there we consort too?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda turned, alas,
Or was turned, by no angel, t'other way,
And got him guidance of The Ravissante.

Now, into the originals of faith,
Yours, mine, Miranda's, no inquiry here!
Of faith, as apprehended by mankind,
The causes, were they caught and catalogued,
Would too distract, too desperately foil
Inquirer. How may analyst reduce
Quantities to exact their opposites,
Value to zero, then bring zero back
To value of supreme preponderance?
How substitute thing meant for thing expressed?
Detect the wire-thread through that fluffy silk
Men call their rope, their real compulsive power?
Suppose effected such anatomy,
And demonstration made of what belief
Has moved believer—were the consequence
Reward at all? would each man straight deduce,
From proved reality of cause, effect
Conformable—believe and unbelieve
According to your True thus disengaged
From all his heap of False called reason first?

No: hand once used to hold a soft thick twist,
Cannot now grope its way by wire alone:
Childhood may catch the knack, scarce
Youth, not Age!
That's the reply rewards you. Just as well
Remonstrate to yon peasant in the blouse
That, had he justified the true intent
Of Nature who composed him thus and thus,
Weakly or strongly, here he would not stand
Struggling with uncongenial earth and sky,
But elsewhere tread the surface of the globe,
Since one meridian suits the faulty lungs,
Another bids the sluggish liver work.
"Here I was born, for better or for worse:
I did not choose a climate for myself;
Admit, my life were healthy, led elsewhere,"
(He answers) "how am I to migrate, pray?"

Therefore the course to take is—spare your
pains,
And trouble uselessly with discontent
Nor soul nor body, by parading proof
That neither haply had known ailment, placed
Precisely where the circumstance forbade
Their lot should fall to either of the pair.
But try and, what you find wrong, remedy,
Accepting the conditions: never ask
"How came you to be born here with those
lungs,
That liver?" But bid asthma smoke a pipe,
Stramonium, just as if no Tropics were,
And ply with calomel the sluggish duct,
Nor taunt "The born Norwegian breeds no
bile!"
And as with body, so proceed with soul:
Nor less discerningly, where faith you found,
However foolish and fantastic, grudge
To play the doctor and amend mistake,
Because a wisdom were conceivable
Whence faith had sprung robust above disease.
Far beyond human help, that source of things!
Since, in the first stage, so to speak,—first stare
Of apprehension at the invisible,—
Begins divergency of mind from mind,
Superior from inferior: leave this first!
Little you change there! What comes after-
ward—
From apprehended thing, each inference
With practicality concerning life,
This you may test and try, confirm the right
Or contravene the wrong which reasons there.
The offspring of the sickly faith must prove
Sickly act also: stop a monster-birth!
When water's in the cup and not the cloud,
Then is the proper time for chemic test:
Belief permits your skill to operate
When, drop by drop condensed from misty
heaven,
'Tis wrung out, lies a bowlful in the fleece.
How dew by spoonfuls came, let Gideon say:
What purpose water serves, your word or two
May teach him, should he fancy it lights fire.

Concerning, then, our vaporous Ravissante—
How fable first precipitated faith—
Silence you get upon such point from me.
But when I see come posting to the pair
At Clairvaux, for the cure of soul-disease,
This Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
This Mother of the Convent, Nun I know—
They practise in that second stage of things;
They boast no fresh distillery of faith;
'Tis dogma in the bottle, bright and old,
They bring; and I pretend to pharmacy.
They undertake the cure with all my heart!
He trusts them, and they surely trust them-
selves.
I ask no better. Never mind the cause,
Fons et origo of the malady:
Apply the drug with courage! Here's our
case.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda asks of God,
—May a man, living in illicit tie,
Continue, by connivance of the Church,
No matter what amends he please to make
Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin?
Physicians, what do you propose for cure?

Father and Mother of the Ravissante,
Read your own records, and you find pre-
scribed
As follows, when a couple out of sorts
Rather than gravely suffering, sought your skill
And thereby got their health again. Perpend!
Two and a half good centuries ago,
Luc de la Maison Rouge, a nobleman

Of Claise, (the river gives this country name)
And, just as noblewoman, Maude his wife,
Having been married many happy years
Spent in God's honour and man's service too,
Conceived, while yet in flower of youth and hope,
The project of departing each from each
Forever, and dissolving marriage-bonds
That both might enter a religious life.
Needing, before they came to such resolve,
Divine illumination,—course was clear,—
They visited your church in pilgrimage,
On Christmas morn: communicating straight,
They heard three Masses proper for the day,
"It is incredible with what effect"—
Quoth the Cistercian monk I copy from—
And, next day, came, again communicants,
Again heard Masses manifold, but now
With added thanks to Christ for special grace
And consolation granted: in the night,
Had been divorce from marriage, manifest
By signs and tokens. So, they made great gifts,
Left money for more Masses, and returned
Homeward rejoicing—he, to take the rules,
As Brother Dionysius, Capucin;
She, to become first postulant, then nun
According to the rules of Benedict,
Sister Scolastica:[1] so ended they,
And so do I—not end nor yet commence
One note or comment. What was done was done.
Now, Father of the Mission, here's your case!
And, Mother of the Convent, here's its cure!
If separation was permissible,
And that decree of Christ "What God hath joined
Let no man put asunder" nullified
Because a couple, blameless in the world,
Had the conceit that, still more blamelessly,
Out of the world, by breach of marriage-vow,
Their life was like to pass,—you oracles
Of God,—since holy Paul says such you are,—
Hesitate, not one moment, to pronounce
When questioned by the pair now needing help
"Each from the other go, you guilty ones,
Preliminary to your least approach
Nearer the Power that thus could strain a point
In favour of a pair of innocents
Who thought their wedded hands not clean enough
To touch and leave unsullied their souls' snow!
Are not your hands found filthy by the world,
Mere human law and custom? Not a step
Nearer till hands be washed and purified!"

What they did say is immaterial, since
Certainly it was nothing of the kind.
There was no washing hands of him (alack,
You take me?—in the figurative sense!),
But, somehow, gloves were drawn o'er dirt and all,
And practice with the Church procured thereby.
Seeing that,—all remonstrance proved in vain,
Persuasives tried and terrors put to use,
I nowise question,—still the guilty pair
Only embraced the closelier, obstinate,—
Father and Mother went from Clairvaux back
Their weary way, with heaviness of heart,
I grant you, but each palm well crossed with coin,
And nothing like a smutch perceptible.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might compound
For sin?—no, surely! but by gifts—prepare
His soul the better for contrition, say!
Gift followed upon gift, at all events.
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:
Hard money, on the other—may we hope
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse?

Two years did this experiment engage
Monsieur Léonce Miranda: how, by gifts
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed
For this man's nature: generosity,—
Susceptibility to human ills,
Corporeal, mental,—self-devotedness
Made up Miranda—whether strong or weak
Elsewhere, may be inquired another time.

[1] Sister of St. Benedict.

In mercy he was strong, at all events.
Enough! he could not see a beast in pain,
Much less a man, without the will to aid;
And where the will was, oft the means were too,
Since that good bargain with the Cousinry.

The news flew fast about the countryside
That, with the kind man, it was ask and have;
And ask and have they did. To instance you:—
A mob of beggars at The Ravissante
Clung to his skirts one day, and cried "We thirst!"
Forthwith he bade a cask of wine be broached
To satisfy all comers, till, dead-drunk
So satisfied, they strewed the holy place.
For this was grown religious and a rite:
Such slips of judgment, gifts irregular,
Showed but as spillings of the golden grist
On either side the hopper, through blind zeal;
Steadily the main stream went pouring on
From mill to mouth of sack—held wide and close
By Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
And Mother of the Convent, Nun I know,
With such effect that, in the sequel, proof
Was tendered to the Court at Vire, last month,
That in these same two years, expenditure
At quiet Clairvaux rose to the amount
Of Forty Thousand English Pounds: whereof
A trifle went, no inappropriate close
Of bounty, to supply the Virgin's crown
With that stupendous jewel from New-York,
Now blazing as befits the Star of Sea.

Such signs of grace, outward and visible,
I rather give you, for your sake and mine,
Than put in evidence the inward strife,
Spiritual effort to compound for fault
By payment of devotion—thank the phrase!
That payment was as punctual, do not doubt,
As its far easier fellow. Yesterday
I trudged the distance from The Ravissante
To Clairvaux, with my two feet: but our friend,
The more to edify the country-folk,
Was wont to make that journey on both knees.
"Maliciously perverted incident!"
Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire:
"The man paid mere devotion as he passed,
Knelt decently at just each wayside shrine!"
Alas, my lawyer, I trudged yesterday—
On my two feet, and with both eyes wide ope,—
The distance, and could find no shrine at all!
According to his lights, I praise the man.
Enough! incessant was devotion, say—
With her, you know of, praying at his side.
Still, there be relaxations of the tense;
Or life indemnifies itself for strain,
Or finds its very strain grow feebleness.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's days were passed
Much as of old, in simple work and play.
His first endeavour, on recovery
From that sad ineffectual sacrifice,
Had been to set about repairing loss:
Never admitting, loss was to repair.
No word at any time escaped his lips
—Betrayed a lurking presence, in his heart,
Of sorrow; no regret for mischief done—
Punishment suffered, he would rather say.
Good-tempered schoolboy-fashion, he preferred
To laugh away his flogging, fair price paid
For pleasure out of bounds: if needs must be,
Get pleasure and get flogged a second time!
A sullen subject would have nursed the scars
And made excuse, for throwing grammar by,
That bench was grown uneasy to the seat.
No: this poor fellow cheerfully got hands
Fit for his stumps, and what hands failed to do,
The other members did in their degree—
Unwonted service. With his mouth alone
He wrote, nay, painted pictures — think of that!
He played on a piano pedal-keyed,
Kicked out—if it was Bach's—good music thence.
He rode, that's readily conceivable,
But then he shot and never missed his bird,
With other feats as dexterous: I infer
He was not ignorant what hands are worth,
When he resolved on ruining his own.

So the two years passed somehow—who shall say
Foolishly,—as one estimates mankind,
The work they do, the play they leave undone?—
Two whole years spent in that experiment
I told you of, at Clairvaux all the time,
From April on to April: why that month
More than another, notable in life?
Does the awakening of the year arouse
Man to new projects, nerve him for fresh feats
Of what proves, for the most part of mankind
Playing or working, novel folly too?
At any rate, I see no slightest sign
Of folly (let me tell you in advance),
Nothing but wisdom meets me manifest
In the procedure of the Twentieth Day
Of April, 'Seventy,—folly's year in France.

It was delightful Spring, and out of doors
Temptation to adventure. Walk or ride?
There was a wild young horse to exercise,
And teach the way to go and pace to keep:
Monsieur Léonce Miranda chose to ride.
So, while they clapped soft saddle straight on back,
And bitted jaw to satisfaction,—since
The partner of his days must stay at home,
Teased by some trifling legacy of March
To throat or shoulder,—visit duly paid
And "farewell" given and received again,—
As chamber-door considerately closed
Behind him, still five minutes were to spend.
How better, than by clearing, two and two,
The staircase-steps and coming out aloft
Upon the platform yonder (raise your eyes!)
And tasting, just as those two years before,
Spring's bright advance upon the tower a-top,
The feature of the front, the Belvedere?

Look at it for a moment while I breathe.

IV.

Ready to hear the rest? How good you are!

Now for this Twentieth splendid day of Spring,
All in a tale,—sun, wind, sky, earth and sea,—
To bid man "Up, be doing!" Mount the stair,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda mounts so brisk,
And look—ere his elastic foot arrive—
Your longest, far and wide, o'er fronting space.
Yon white streak—Havre lighthouse! Name and name,
How the mind runs from each to each relay,
Town after town, till Paris' self be touched,
Superlatively big with life and death
To all the world, that very day perhaps!
He who stepped out upon the platform here,
Pinnacled over the expanse, gave thought
Neither to Rouher nor Ollivier, Roon
Nor Bismarck, Emperor nor King, but just
To steeple, church, and shrine, The Ravissante!

He saw Her, whom myself saw, but when Spring
Was passing into Fall: not robed and crowned
As, thanks to him, and her you know about,
She stands at present; but She smiled the same.
Thither he turned—to never turn away.

He thought . . .

(Suppose I should prefer "He said?"
Along with every act—and speech is act—
There go, a multitude impalpable
To ordinary human faculty,
The thoughts which give the act significance.
Who is a poet needs must apprehend
Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.
Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry:
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word at all,
But thought as follows—in a minute's space—
One particle of ore beats out such leaf!

"This Spring-morn I am forty-three years old:
In prime of life, perfection of estate
Bodily, mental, nay, material too,—
My whole of worldly fortunes reach their height.

Body and soul alike on eminence:
It is not probable I ever raise
Soul above standard by increase of worth,
Nor reasonably may expect to lift
Body beyond the present altitude.

"Behold me, Lady called The Ravissante!
Such as I am, I—gave myself to you
So long since, that I cannot say 'I give.'
All my belongings, what is summed in life,
I have submitted wholly—as man might,
At least, as *I* might, who am weak, not strong,—
Wholly, then, to your rule and governance,
So far as I had strength. My weakness was—
I felt a fascination, at each point
And pore of me, a Power as absolute
Claiming that soul should recognize her sway.
O you were no whit clearlier Queen, I see,
Throughout the life that rolls out ribbon-like
Its shot-silk length behind me, than the strange
Mystery—how shall I denominate
The unrobed One? Robed you go and crowned as well,
Named by the nations: she is hard to name,
Though you have spelt out certain characters
Obscure upon what fillet binds her brow,
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, life's pride.
'So call her, and contemn the enchantress!'
—'Crush
The despot, and recover liberty!'—
Cried despot and enchantress at each ear.
You were conspicuous and pre-eminent,
Authoritative and imperial,—you
Spoke first, claimed homage: did I hesitate?
Born for no mastery, but servitude,
Men cannot serve two masters, says the Book;
Master should measure strength with master, then,
Before on servant is imposed a task.
You spoke first, promised best, and threatened most;
The other never threatened, promised, spoke
A single word, but, when your part was done,
Lifted a finger, and I, prostrate, knew
Films were about me, though you stood aloof
Smiling or frowning 'Where is power like mine
To punish or reward thee? Rise, thou fool!
Will to be free, and, lo, I lift thee loose!'
Did I not will, and could I rise a whit?
Lay I, at any time, content to lie?
'To lie, at all events, brings pleasure: make
Amends by undemanded pain!' I said.
Did not you prompt me? 'Purchase now by pain
Pleasure hereafter in the world to come!'
I could not pluck my heart out, as you bade
Unbidden, I burned off my hands at least.
My soul retained its treasure; but my purse
Lightened itself with much alacrity.
Well, where is the reward? what promised fruit
Of sacrifice in peace, content? what sense
Of added strength to bear or to forbear?
What influx of new light assists me now
Even to guess you recognize a gain
In what was loss enough to mortal me?
But she, the less authoritative voice,
Oh, how distinct enunciating, how
Plain dealing! Gain she gave was gain indeed!
That, you deny: that, you contemptuous call
Acorns, swine's food not man's meat! 'Spurn the draff!'
Ay, but those life-tree apples I prefer,
Am I to die of hunger till they drop?
Husks keep flesh from starvation, anyhow.
Give those life-apples!—one, worth woods of oak,
Worth acorns by the waggon-load,—one shoot
Through heart and brain, assurance bright and brief
That you, my Lady, my own Ravissante,
Feel, through my famine, served and satisfied,
Own me, your starveling, soldier of a sort!
Your soldier! do I read my title clear
Even to call myself your friend, not foe?
What is the pact between us but a truce?
At best I shall have staved off enmity,
Obtained a respite, ransomed me from wrath.
I pay, instalment by instalment, life,
Earth's tribute-money, pleasures great and small,

Whereof should at the last one penny piece
Fall short, the whole heap becomes forfeiture.
You find in me deficient soldiership:
Want the whole life or none. I grudge that whole,
Because I am not sure of recompense:
Because I want faith. Whose the fault? I ask.
If insufficient faith have done thus much,
Contributed thus much of sacrifice,
More would move mountains, you are warrant. Well,
Grant, you, the grace, I give the gratitude!
And what were easier? 'Ask and have' folk call
Miranda's method: 'Have, nor need to ask!'
So do they formulate your quality
Superlative beyond my human grace.
The Ravissante, you ravish men away
From puny aches and petty pains, assuaged
By man's own art with small expenditure
Of pill or potion, unless, put to shame,
Nature is roused and sets things right herself.
Your miracles are grown our commonplace;
No day but pilgrim hobbles his last mile,
Kneels down and rises up, flings crutch away,
Or else appends it to the reverend heap
Beneath you, votive cripple-carpentry.
Some few meet failure—oh, they wanted faith,
And may betake themselves to La Salette,
Or seek Lourdes, so that hence the scandal limp!
The many get their grace and go their way
Rejoicing, with a tale to tell,—most like,
A staff to borrow, since the crutch is gone,
Should the first telling happen at my house,
And teller wet his whistle with my wine.
I tell this to a doctor and he laughs:
'Give me permission to cry—Out of bed,
You loth rheumatic sluggard! Cheat yon chair
Of laziness, its gouty occupant!—
You should see miracles performed. But now,
I give advice, and take as fee ten francs,
And do as much as does your Ravissante.
Send her that case of cancer to be cured
I have refused to treat for any fee,
Bring back my would-be patient sound and whole,
And see me laugh on t'other side my mouth!'
Can he be right, and are you hampered thus?
Such pettiness restricts a miracle
Wrought by the Great Physician, who hears prayer,
Visibly seated in your mother-lap!
He, out of nothing, made sky, earth, and sea,
And all that in them is—man, beast, bird, fish,
Down to this insect on my parapet.
Look how the marvel of a minim crawls!
Were I to kneel among the halt and maimed,
And pray 'Who mad'st the insect with ten legs,
Make me one finger grow where ten were once!'
The very priests would thrust me out of church.
'What folly does the madman dare expect?
No faith obtains—in this late age, at least—
Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!'

"Ay, bring the early ages back again,
What prodigy were unattainable?
I read your annals. Here came Louis Onze,
Gave thrice the sum he ever gave before
At one time, some three hundred crowns, to wit—
On pilgrimage to pray for—health, he found?
Did he? I do not read it in Commines.[1]
Here sent poor joyous Marie-Antoinette
To thank you that a Dauphin dignified
Her motherhood—called Duke of Normandy
And Martyr of the Temple, much the same
As if no robe of hers had dressed you rich;
No silver lamps, she gave, illume your shrine!
Here, following example, fifty years
Ago, in gratitude for birth again
Of yet another destined King of France,
Did not the Duchess fashion with her hands,
And frame in gold and crystal, and present
A bouquet made of artificial flowers?
And was he King of France, and is not he
Still Count of Chambord?

[1] Philippe de Commines, the famous chronicler (1445–1509).

"Such the days of faith,
And such their produce to encourage mine!
What now, if I too count without my host?
I too have given money, ornament,
And 'artificial flowers'—which, when I plucked,
Seemed rooting at my heart and real enough:
What if I gain thereby nor health of mind,
Nor youth renewed which perished in its prime,
Burnt to a cinder 'twixt the red-hot bars,
Nor gain to see my second baby-hope
Of managing to live on terms with both
Opposing potentates, the Power and you,
Crowned with success? I dawdle out my days
In exile here at Clairvaux, with mock love,
That gives—while whispering 'Would I dared refuse!'—
What the loud voice declares my heart's free gift:
Mock worship, mock superiority
O'er those I style the world's benighted ones,
That irreligious sort I pity so,
Dumas and even Hertford who is Duke.

"Impiety? Not if I know myself!
Not if you know the heart and soul I bare,
I bid you cut, hack, slash, anatomize,
Till peccant part be found and flung away!
Demonstrate where I need more faith! Describe
What act shall evidence sufficiency
Of faith, your warrant for such exercise
Of power, in my behalf, as all the world
Except poor praying me declares profuse?
Poor me? It is that world, not me alone,
That world which prates of fixed laws and the like,
I fain would save, poor world so ignorant!
And your part were—what easy miracle?
Oh, Lady, could I make your want like mine!"

Then his face grew one luminosity.

"Simple, sufficient! Happiness at height!
I solve the riddle, I persuade mankind.
I have been just the simpleton who stands—
Summoned to claim his patrimonial rights—
At shilly-shally, may he knock or no
At his own door in his own house and home
Whereof he holds the very title-deeds!
Here is my title to this property,
This power you hold for profit of myself
And all the world at need—which need is now!

"My title—let me hear who controverts!
Count Mailleville built yon church. Why did he so?
Because he found your image. How came that?
His shepherd told him that a certain sheep
Was wont to scratch with hoof and scrape with horn
At ground where once the Danes had razed a church.
Thither he went, and there he dug, and thence
He disinterred the image he conveyed
In pomp to Londres yonder, his domain.
You liked the old place better than the new.
The Count might surely have divined as much:
He did not; someone might have spoke a word:
No one did. A mere dream had warned enough
That back again in pomp you best were borne:
No dream warned, and no need of convoy was;
An angel caught you up and clapped you down—
No mighty task, you stand one *mètre* high,
And people carry you about at times.
Why, then, did you despise the simple course?
Because you are the Queen of Angels: when
You front us in a picture, there flock they,
Angels around you, here and everywhere.

"Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,
Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,
I summon them to bear me to your feet
From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip!
Faith without flaw! I trust your potency,
Benevolence, your will to save the world—
By such a simplest of procedures, too!
Not even by affording angel-help,
Unless it please you: there's a simpler mode:
Only suspend the law of gravity,

And, while at back, permitted to propel,
The air helps onward, let the air in front
Cease to oppose my passage through the midst!

"Thus I bestride the railing, leg o'er leg,
Thus, lo, I stand, a single inch away,
At dizzy edge of death,—no touch of fear,
As safe on tower above as turf below!
Your smile enswathes me in beatitude,
You lift along the votary—who vaults,
Who, in the twinkling of an eye, revives,
Dropt safely in the space before the church—
How crowded, since this morn is market-day!
I shall not need to speak. The news will run
Like wild-fire. 'Thousands saw Miranda's flight!'
'Tis telegraphed to Paris in a trice.
The Boulevard is one buzz 'Do you believe?
Well, this time, thousands saw Miranda's flight:
You know him, goldsmith in the Place Vendôme.'
In goes the Empress to the Emperor:
'Now—will you hesitate to make disgorge
Your wicked King of Italy his gains,
Give the Legations to the Pope once more?'
Which done,—why, grace goes back to operate,
They themselves set a good example first,
Resign the empire twenty years usurped,
And Henry, the Desired One, reigns o'er France!
Regenerated France makes all things new!
My house no longer stands on Quai Rousseau
But Quai rechristened Alacoque:[1] a quai
Where Renan burns his book, and Veuillot[2] burns
Renan beside, since Veuillot rules the roast,
Re-edits now indeed 'The Universe.'[3]
O blessing, O superlatively big
With blessedness beyond all blessing dreamed
By man! for just that promise has effect,
'Old things shall pass away and all be new!'
Then, for a culminating mercy-feat,

[1] Margaret Mary Alacoque, foundress of a religious order, *d.* 1690.
[2] An Ultramontane writer.
[3] M. Veuillot's paper.

Wherefore should I dare dream impossible
That I too have my portion in the change?
My past with all its sorrow, sin and shame,
Becomes a blank, a nothing! There she stands,
Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,
Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence!
There never was Muhlhausen, nor at all
Duke Hertford: nought that was, remains, except
The beauty,—yes, the beauty is unchanged!
Well, and the soul too, that must keep the same!
And so the trembling little virgin hand
Melts into mine, that's back again, of course!
—Think not I care about my poor old self!
I only want my hand for that one use,
To take her hand, and say 'I marry you—
Men, women, angels, you behold my wife!
There is no secret, nothing wicked here,
Nothing she does not wish the world to know!'
None of your married women have the right
To mutter 'Yes, indeed, she beats us all
In beauty,—but our lives are pure at least!'
Bear witness, for our marriage is no thing
Done in a corner! 'Tis The Ravissante
Repairs the wrong of Paris. See, She smiles,
She beckons, She bids 'Hither, both of you!'
And may we kneel? And will you bless us both?
And may I worship you, and yet love her?
Then!"—
A sublime spring from the balustrade
About the tower so often talked about,
A flash in middle air, and stone-dead lay
Monsieur Léonce Miranda on the turf.

A gardener who watched, at work the while
Dibbling a flower-bed for geranium-shoots,
Saw the catastrophe, and, straightening back,
Stood up and shook his brows. "Poor soul, poor soul!
Just what I prophesied the end would be!
Ugh—the Red Night-cap!" (as he raised the head)
"This must be what he meant by those strange words

While I was weeding larkspurs yesterday,
'Angels would take him!' Mad!"

No! sane, I say.
Such being the conditions of his life,
Such end of life was not irrational.
Hold a belief, you only half-believe,
With all-momentous issues either way,—
And I advise you imitate this leap,
Put faith to proof, be cured or killed at once!
Call you men, killed through cutting cancer out,
The worse for such an act of bravery?
That's more than *I* know. In my estimate,
Better lie prostrate on his turf at peace,
Than, wistful, eye, from out the tent, the tower,
Racked with a doubt "Will going on bare knees
All the way to The Ravissante and back,
Saying my Ave Mary all the time,
Somewhat excuse if I postpone my march?
—Make due amends for that one kiss I gave
In gratitude to her who held me out
Superior Fricquot's sermon, hot from press,
A-spread with hands so sinful yet so smooth?"

And now, sincerely do I pray she stand,
Clara, with interposing sweep of robe,
Between us and this horror! Any screen
Turns white by contrast with the tragic pall;
And her dubiety distracts at least,
As well as snow, from such decided black.
With womanhood, at least, we have to do:
Ending with Clara—is the word too kind?

Let pass the shock! There's poignancy enough
When what one parted with, a minute since,
Alive and happy, is returned a wreck—
All that was, all that seemed about to be,
Razed out and ruined now for evermore,
Because a straw descended on this scale
Rather than that, made death o'erbalance life.
But think of cage-mates in captivity,
Inured to day-long, night-long vigilance
Each of the other's tread and angry turn
If behind prison-bars the jailer knocked:
These whom society shut out, and thus
Penned in, to settle down and regulate
By the strange law, the solitary life—
When death divorces such a fellowship,
Theirs may pair off with that prodigious woe
Imagined of a ghastly brotherhood—
One watcher left in lighthouse out at sea
With leagues of surf between the land and him
Alive with his dead partner on the rock;
One galley-slave, whom curse and blow compel
To labour on, ply oar—beside his chain,
Encumbered with a corpse-companion now.
Such these: although, no prisoners, self-entrenched
They kept the world off from their barricade.

Memory, gratitude was poignant, sure,
Though pride brought consolation of a kind.
Twenty years long had Clara been—of whom
The rival, nay, the victor, past dispute?
What if in turn The Ravissante at length
Proved victor—which was doubtful—anyhow,
Here lay the inconstant with, conspicuous too,
The fruit of his good fortune!

"Has he gained
By leaving me?" she might soliloquize:
"All love could do, I did for him. I learned
By heart his nature, what he loved and loathed,
Leaned to with liking, turned from with distaste.
No matter what his least velleity,
I was determined he should want no wish,
And in conformity administered
To his requirement; most of joy I mixed
With least of sorrow in life's daily draught,
Twenty years long, life's proper average.
And when he got to quarrel with my cup,
Would needs outsweeten honey, and discard
That gall-drop we require lest nectar cloy,—
I did not call him fool, and vex my friend,
But quietly allowed experiment,
Encouraged him to spice his drink, and now
Grate *lignum vitæ*,[1] now bruise so-called grains
Of Paradise,[2] and pour now, for perfume,

[1] Guaiacum wood, good for rheumatism.
[2] Name for an aromatic drug.

Distilment rare, the rose of Jericho,
Holy-thorn, passion-flower, and what know I?
Till beverage obtained the fancied smack.
'Twas wild-flower-wine that neither helped nor harmed
Who sipped and held it for restorative—
What harm? But here has he been through the hedge
Straying in search of simples, while my back
Was turned a minute, and he finds a prize,
Monkshood and belladonna! O my child,
My truant little boy, despite the beard,
The body two feet broad and six feet long,
And what the calendar counts middle age—
You wanted, did you, to enjoy a flight?
Why not have taken into confidence
Me, that was mother to you?—never mind
What mock disguise of mistress held you mine!
Had you come laughing, crying, with request,
'Make me fly, mother!' I had run upstairs
And held you tight the while I danced you high
In air from tower-top, singing 'Off we go
(On pilgrimage to Lourdes some day next month)
And swift we soar (to Rome with Peter-pence)
And low we light (at Paris where we pick
Another jewel from our store of stones
And send it for a present to the Pope)!'
So, dropt indeed you were, but on my knees,
Rolling and crowing, not a whit the worse
For journey to your Ravissante and back.
Now, no more Clairvaux—which I made you build,
And think an inspiration of your own—
No more fine house, trim garden, pretty park,
Nothing I used to busy you about,
And make believe you worked for my surprise!
What weariness to me will work become
Now that I need not seem surprised again!
This boudoir, for example, with the doves
(My stupid maid has damaged, dusting one)
Embossed in stucco o'er the looking-glass
Beside the toilet-table! dear—dear me!"

Here she looked up from her absorbing grief,
And round her, crow-like grouped, the Cousinry,
(She grew aware) sat witnesses at watch.
For, two days had elapsed since fate befell
The courser in the meadow, stretched so stark.
They did not cluster on the tree-tops, close
Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate
For nothing: but, like calm determined crows,
They came to take possession of their corpse.
And who shall blame them? Had not they the right?

One spoke. "They would be gentle, not austere.
They understood and were compassionate.
Madame Muhlhausen lay too abject now
For aught but the sincerest pity; still,
Since plain speech salves the wound it seems to make,
They must speak plainly — circumstances spoke!
Sin had conceived and brought forth death indeed.
As the commencement so the close of things:
Just what might be expected all along!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda launched his youth
Into a cesspool of debauchery,
And if he thence emerged all dripping slime,
Where was the change except from thin to thick,
One warm rich mud-bath, Madame?—you, in place
Of Paris-drainage and distilment, you
He never needed budge from, boiled to rags!
True, some good instinct left the natural man,
Some touch of that deep dye wherewith imbued
By education, in his happier day,
The hopeful offspring of high parentage
Was fleece-marked moral and religious sheep,—
Some ruddle, faint remainder, (we admit)
Stuck to Miranda, rubbed he ne'er so rude
Against the goatly coarseness: to the last,
Moral he styled himself, religious too!
Which means—what ineradicable good

You found, you never left till good's self proved
Perversion and distortion, nursed to growth
So monstrous, that the tree-stock, dead and dry,
Were seemlier far than such a heap grotesque
Of fungous flourishing excrescence. Here
Sap-like affection, meant for family,
Stole off to feed one sucker fat—yourself;
While branchage, trained religiously aloft
To rear its head in reverence to the sun,
Was pulled down earthward, pegged and picketed,
By topiary contrivance, till the tree
Became an arbour where, at vulgar ease,
Sat superstition grinning through the loops.
Still, nature is too strong or else too weak
For cockney treatment: either, tree springs back
To pristine shape, or else degraded droops,
And turns to touchwood at the heart. So here—
Body and mind, at last the man gave way.
His body—there it lies, what part was left
Unmutilated! for, the strife commenced
Two years ago, when both hands burnt to ash,
—A branch broke loose, by loss of what choice twigs!
As for his mind—behold our register
Of all its moods, from the incipient mad,
Nay, mere erratic, to the stark insane,
Absolute idiocy or what is worse!
All have we catalogued—extravagance
In worldly matters, luxury absurd,
And zeal as crazed in its expenditure
Of nonsense called devotion. Don't we know
—We Cousins, bound in duty to our kin,—
What mummeries were practised by you two
At Clairvaux? Not a servant got discharge
But came and told his grievance, testified
To acts which turn religion to a farce.
And as the private mock, so patent—see—
The public scandal! Ask the neighbourhood—
Or rather, since we asked them long ago,
Read what they answer, depositions down,
Signed, sealed and sworn to! Brief, the man was mad.
We are his heirs and claim our heritage.
Madame Muhlhausen,—whom good taste forbids
We qualify as do these documents,—
Fear not lest justice stifle mercy's prayer!
True, had you lent a willing ear at first,
Had you obeyed our call two years ago,
Restrained a certain insolence of eye,
A volubility of tongue, that time,
Your prospects had been none the worse, perhaps.
Still, fear not but a decent competence
Shall smooth the way for your declining age!
What we propose, then . . ."

Clara dried her eyes,
Sat up, surveyed the consistory, spoke
After due pause, with something of a smile.

"Gentlemen, kinsfolk of my friend defunct,
In thus addressing me—of all the world!—
You much misapprehend what part I play.
I claim no property you speak about.
You might as well address the park-keeper,
Harangue him on some plan advisable
For covering the park with cottage-plots.
He is the servant, no proprietor,
His business is to see the sward kept trim,
Untrespassed over by the indiscreet:
Beyond that, he refers you to myself—
'Another servant of another kind—
Who again—quite as limited in act—
Refer you, with your projects,—can I else?
To who in mastery is ultimate,
The Church. The Church is sole administrant,
Since sole possessor of what worldly wealth
Monsieur Léonce Miranda late possessed.
Often enough has he attempted, nay,
Forced me, well-nigh, to occupy the post
You seemingly suppose I fill,—receive
As gift the wealth entrusted me as grace.
This—for quite other reasons than appear
So cogent to your perspicacity—
This I refused; and, firm as you could wish,
Still was my answer 'We two understand

Each one the other. I am intimate
—As how can be mere fools and knaves—
or, say,
Even your Cousins?—with your love to me,
Devotion to the Church. Would Providence
Appoint, and make me certain of the same,
That I survive you (which is little like,
Seeing you hardly overpass my age
And more than match me in abundant health)
In such case, certainly I would accept
Your bounty: better I than alien hearts
Should execute your planned benevolence
To man, your proposed largess to the Church.
But though I be survivor,—weakly frame,
With only woman's wit to make amends,—
When I shall die, or while I am alive,
Cannot you figure me an easy mark
For hypocritical rapacity,
Kith, kin and generation, couching low,
Ever on the alert to pounce on prey?
Far be it I should say they profited
By that first frenzy-fit themselves induced,—
Cold-blooded scenical buffoons at sport
With horror and damnation o'er a grave:
That were too shocking—I absolve them
there!
Nor did they seize the moment of your swoon
To rifle-pocket, wring a paper thence,
Their Cousinly dictation, and enrich
Thereby each mother's son as heart could
wish,
Had nobody supplied a codicil.
But when the pain, poor friend! had pro-
strated
Your body, though your soul was right once
more,
I fear they turned your weakness to account!
Why else to me, who agonizing watched,
Sneak, cap in hand, now bribe me to forsake
My maimed Léonce, now bully, cap on head,
The impudent pretension to assuage
Such sorrows as demanded Cousins' care?—
For you rejected, hated, fled me, far
In foreign lands you laughed at me!—they
judged.
And, think you, will the unkind ones hesitate
To try conclusions with my helplessness,—
To pounce on and misuse your derelict,
Helped by advantage that bereavement lends
Folk, who, while yet you lived, played tricks
like these?
You only have to die, and they detect,
In all you said and did, insanity!
Your faith was fetish-worship, your regard
For Christ's prime precept which endows the
poor
And strips the rich, a craze from first to last!
They so would limn your likeness, paint your
life,
That if it ended by some accident,—
For instance, if, attempting to arrange
The plants below that dangerous Belvedere
I cannot warn you from sufficiently,
You lost your balance and fell headlong—
fine
Occasion, such, for crying *Suicide!*
Non compos mentis, naturally next,
Hands over Clairvaux to a Cousin-tribe
Who nor like me nor love The Ravissante:
Therefore be ruled by both! Life-interest
In Clairvaux,—conservation, guardianship
Of earthly good for heavenly purpose,—give
Such and no other proof of confidence!
Let Clara represent the Ravissante!'
—To whom accordingly, he then and there
Bequeathed each stick and stone, by testa-
ment
In holograph, mouth managing the quill:
Go, see the same in Londres, if you doubt!"

Then smile grew laugh, as sudden up she
stood
And out she spoke: intemperate the speech!
"And now, sirs, for your special courtesy,
Your candle held up to the character
Of Lucie Steiner, whom you qualify
As coming short of perfect womanhood.
Yes, kindly critics, truth for once you tell!
True is it that through childhood, poverty,
Sloth, pressure of temptation, I succumbed,
And, ere I found what honour meant, lost
mine.
So was the sheep lost, which the Shepherd
found
And never lost again. My friend found me;
Or better say, the Shepherd found us both—

Since he, my friend, was much in the same mire
When first we made acquaintance. Each helped each,—
A two-fold extrication from the slough;
And, saving me, he saved himself. Since then,
Unsmirched we kept our cleanliness of coat.
It is his perfect constancy, you call
My friend's main fault—he never left his love!
While as for me, I dare your worst, impute
One breach of loving bond, these twenty years,
To me whom only cobwebs bound, you count!
'He was religiously disposed in youth!'
That may be, though we did not meet at church.
Under my teaching did he, like you scamps,
Become Voltairian—fools who mock his faith?
'Infirm of body!' I am silent there:
Even yourselves acknowledge service done,
Whatever motive your own souls supply
As inspiration. Love made labour light."

Then laugh grew frown, and frown grew terrible.
Do recollect what sort of person shrieked—
"Such was I, saint or sinner, what you please:
And who is it casts stone at me but you?
By your own showing, sirs, you bought and sold,
Took what advantage bargain promised bag,
Abundantly did business, and with whom?
The man whom you pronounce imbecile, push
Indignantly aside if he presume
To settle his affairs like other folk!
How is it you have stepped into his shoes
And stand there, bold as brass, 'Miranda, late,
Now, Firm-Miranda'? Sane, he signed away
That little birthright, did he? Hence to trade!
I know and he knew who 'twas dipped and ducked,
Truckled and played the parasite in vain,
As now one, now the other, here you cringed,
Were feasted, took our presents, you—those drops
Just for your wife's adornment! you—that spray
Exactly suiting, as most diamonds would,
Your daughter on her marriage! No word then
Of somebody the wanton! Hence, I say,
Subscribers to the *Siècle*, every snob—
For here the post brings me the *Univers!*
Home and make money in the Place Vendôme,
Sully yourselves no longer by my sight,
And, when next Schneider wants a new *parure*,
Be careful lest you stick there by mischance
That stone beyond compare entrusted you
To kindle faith with, when, Miranda's gift,
Crowning the very crown, the Ravissante
Shall claim it! As to Clairvaux—talk to Her!
She answers by the Chapter of Raimbaux!"
Vituperative, truly! All this wrath
Because the man's relations thought him mad!
Whereat, I hope you see the Cousinry
Turn each to other, blankly dolorous,
Consult a moment, more by shrug and shrug
Than mere man's language,—finally conclude
To leave the reprobate untroubled now
In her unholy triumph, till the Law
Shall right the injured ones; for gentlemen
Allow the female sex, this sort at least,
Its privilege. So, simply "Cockatrice!"—
"Jezebel!"—"Queen of the Camellias!"—cried
Cousin to cousin, as yon hinge a-creak
Shut out the party, and the gate returned
To custody of Clairvaux. "Pretty place!
What say you, when it proves our property,
To trying a concurrence with La Roche,
And laying down a rival oyster-bed?
Where the park ends, the sea begins, you know."
So took they comfort till they came to Vire.

But I would linger, fain to snatch a look
At Clara as she stands in pride of place,
Somewhat more satisfying than my glance

So furtive, so near futile, yesterday,
Because one must be courteous. Of the masks
That figure in this little history,
She only has a claim to my respect,
And one-eyed, in her French phrase, rules the blind.
Miranda hardly did his best with life:
He might have opened eye, exerted brain,
Attained conception as to right and law
In certain points respecting intercourse
Of man with woman—love, one likes to say;
Which knowledge had dealt rudely with the claim
Of Clara to play representative
And from perdition rescue soul, forsooth!
Also, the sense of him should have sufficed
For building up some better theory
Of how God operates in heaven and earth,
Than would establish Him participant
In doings yonder at the Ravissante.
The heart was wise according to its lights
And limits; but the head refused more sun,
And shrank into its mew and craved less space.
Clara, I hold the happier specimen,—
It may be, through that artist-preference
For work complete, inferiorly proposed,
To incompletion, though it aim aright.
Morally, no! Aspire, break bounds! I say,
Endeavour to be good, and better still,
And best! Success is nought, endeavour's all.
But intellect adjusts the means to ends,
Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least;
No prejudice to high thing, intellect
Would do and will do, only give the means.
Miranda, in my picture-gallery,
Presents a Blake; be Clara—Meissonier!
Merely considered so by artist, mind!
For, break through Art and rise to poetry,
Being Art to tremble nearer, touch enough
The verge of vastness to inform our soul
What orb makes transit through the dark above,
And there's the triumph!—there the incomplete,
More than completion, matches the immense,—
Then, Michelagnolo against the world!
With this proviso, let me study her
Approvingly, the finished little piece!
Born, bred, with just one instinct,—that of growth,—
Her quality was, caterpillar-like,
To all-unerringly select a leaf
And without intermission feed her fill,
Become the Painted-peacock, or belike
The Brimstone-wing, when time of year should suit;
And 'tis a sign (say entomologists)
Of sickness, when the creature stops its meal
One minute, either to look up at heaven,
Or turn aside for change of aliment.
No doubt there was a certain ugliness
In the beginning, as the grub grew worm:
She could not find the proper plant at once,
But crawled and fumbled through a whole parterre.
Husband Muhlhausen served for stuff not long:
Then came confusion of the slimy track
From London, "where she gave the tone awhile,"
To Paris: let the stalks start up again,
Now she is off them, all the greener they!
But, settled on Miranda, how she sucked,
Assimilated juices, took the tint,
Mimicked the form and texture of her food!
Was he for pastime? Who so frolic-fond
As Clara? Had he a devotion-fit?
Clara grew serious with like qualm, be sure!
In health and strength he,—healthy too and strong,
She danced, rode, drove, took pistol-practice, fished,
Nay, "managed sea-skiff with consummate skill."
In pain and weakness, he,—she patient watched
And wiled the slow drip-dropping hours away.
She bound again the broken self-respect,
She picked out the true meaning from mistake,
Praised effort in each stumble, laughed "Well-climbed!"

When others groaned "None ever grovelled so!"
"Rise, you have gained experience!" was her word:
"Lie satisfied, the ground is just your place!"
They thought appropriate counsel. "Live, not die,
And take my full life to eke out your own:
That shall repay me and with interest!
Write!—is your mouth not clever as my hand?
Paint!—the last Exposition warrants me,
Plenty of people must ply brush with toes.
And as for music—look, what folk nickname
A lyre, those ancients played to ravishment,—
Over the *pendule*, see, Apollo grasps
A three-stringed gimcrack which no Liszt could coax
Such music from as jew's-harp makes to-day!
Do your endeavour like a man, and leave
The rest to 'fortune who assists the bold'—
Learn, you, the Latin which you taught me first,
You clever creature—clever, yes, I say!"

If he smiled "Let us love, love's wrong comes right,
Shows reason last of all! Necessity
Must meanwhile serve for plea—so, mind not much
Old Fricquot's menace!"—back she smiled "Who minds?"
If he sighed "Ah, but She is strict, they say,
For all Her mercy at the Ravissante,
She scarce will be put off so!"—straight a sigh
Returned "My lace must go to trim Her gown!"
I nowise doubt she inwardly believed
Smiling and sighing had the same effect
Upon the venerated image. What
She did believe in, I as little doubt,
Was—Clara's self's own birthright to sustain
Existence, grow from grub to butterfly,
Upon unlimited Miranda-leaf;
In which prime article of faith confirmed,
According to capacity, she fed
On and on till the leaf was eaten up
That April morning. Even then, I praise
Her forethought which prevented leafless stalk
Bestowing any hoarded succulence
On earwig and blackbeetle squat beneath
Clairvaux, that stalk whereto her hermitage
She tacked by golden throw of silk, so fine,
So anything but feeble, that her sleep
Inside it, through last winter, two years long,
Recked little of the storm and strife without.
"But—loved him?" Friend, I do not praise her love!
True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.
"Worship not me but God!" the angels urge:
That is love's grandeur: still, in pettier love
The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.
Shall mine degrade the velvet green and puce
Of caterpillar, palmer-worm—or what—
Ball in and out of ball, each ball with brush
Of Venus' eye-fringe round the turquoise egg
That nestles soft,—compare such paragon
With any scarabæus of the brood
Which, born to fly, keeps wing in wing-case, walks
Persistently a-trundling dung on earth?
Egypt may venerate such hierophants,
Not I—the couple yonder, Father Priest
And Mother Nun, who came and went and came,
Beset this Clairvaux, trundled money-muck
To midden and the main heap oft enough,
But never bade unshut from sheath the gauze,
Nor showed that, who would fly, must let fall filth,
And warn "Your jewel, brother, is a blotch:
Sister, your lace trails ordure! Leave your sins,
And so best gift with Crown and grace with Robe!"

The superstition is extinct, you hope?
It were, with my good will! Suppose it so,
Bethink you likewise of the latest use

Whereto a Night-cap is convertible,
And draw your very thickest, thread and thrum,
O'er such a decomposing face of things,
Once so alive, it seemed immortal too!

This happened two years since. The Cousinry
Returned to Paris, called in help from Law,
And in due form proceeded to dispute
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's competence,
Being insane, to make a valid Will.

Much testimony volunteered itself;
The issue hardly could be doubtful—but
For that sad 'Seventy which must intervene,
Provide poor France with other work to mind
Than settling lawsuits, even for the sake
Of such a party as the Ravissante.
It only was this Summer that the case
Could come and be disposed of, two weeks since,
At Vire—Tribunal Civil—Chamber First.

Here, issued with all regularity,
I hold the judgment—just, inevitable,
Nowise to be contested by what few
Can judge the judges; sum and substance, thus—

"Inasmuch as we find, the Cousinry,
During that very period when they take
Monsieur Léonce Miranda for stark mad,
Considered him to be quite sane enough
For doing much important business with—
Nor showed suspicion of his competence
Until, by turning of the tables, loss
Instead of gain accrued to them thereby,—
Plea of incompetence we set aside.

—"The rather, that the dispositions, sought
To be impugned, are natural and right,
Nor jar with any reasonable claim
Of kindred, friendship or acquaintance here.
Nobody is despoiled, none overlooked;
Since the testator leaves his property
To just that person whom, of all the world,
He counted he was most indebted to.
In mere discharge, then, of conspicuous debt,
Madame Muhlhausen has priority,
Enjoys the usufruct of Clairvaux.

"Next,
Such debt discharged, such life determining,
Such earthly interest provided for,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda may bequeath,
In absence of more fit recipient, fund
And usufruct together to the Church
Whereof he was a special devotee.

"—Which disposition, being consonant
With a long series of such acts and deeds
Notorious in his life-time, needs must stand,
Unprejudiced by eccentricity
Nowise amounting to distemper: since,
In every instance signalized as such,
We recognize no overleaping bounds,
No straying out of the permissible:
Duty to the Religion of the Land,—
Neither excessive nor inordinate.

"The minor accusations are dismissed;
They prove mere freak and fancy, boyish mood
In age mature of simple kindly man.
Exuberant in generosities
To all the world: no fact confirms the fear
He meditated mischief to himself
That morning when he met the accident
Which ended fatally. The case is closed."

How otherwise? So, when I grazed the skirts,
And had the glimpse of who made, yesterday,—
Woman and retinue of goats and sheep,—
The sombre path one whiteness, vision-like,
As out of gate, and in at gate again,
They wavered,—she was lady there for life:
And, after life—I hope, a white success
Of some sort, wheresoever life resume
School interrupted by vacation—death;
Seeing that home she goes with prize in hand,
Confirmed the Châtelaine of Clairvaux.

True,
Such prize fades soon to insignificance.
Though she have eaten her Miranda up,
And spun a cradle-cone through which she pricks

Her passage, and proves Peacock-butterfly
This Autumn—wait a little week of cold!
Peacock and death's-head-moth end much the same.
And could she still continue spinning,—sure,
Cradle would soon crave shroud for substitute,
And o'er this life of hers distaste would drop
Red-cotton-Night-cap-wise.

How say you, friend? Have I redeemed my promise? Smile assent
Through the dark Winter-gloom between us both!
Already, months ago and miles away,
I just as good as told you, in a flash,
The while we paced the sands before my house,
All this poor story—truth and nothing else.
Accept that moment's flashing, amplified,
Impalpability reduced to speech,
Conception proved by birth,—no other change!
Can what Saint-Rambert flashed me in a thought,
Good gloomy London make a poem of?
Such ought to be whatever dares precede,
Play ruddy herald-star to your white blaze
About to bring us day. How fail imbibe
Some foretaste of effulgence? Sun shall wax,
And star shall wane: what matter, so star tell
The drowsy world to start awake, rub eyes,
And stand all ready for morn's joy a-blush?

January 23, 1873.

THE INN ALBUM.

1875

[For the alleged foundation of this story, see *Notes and Queries*, March 25, 1876.]

THE INN ALBUM.

I.

"THAT oblong book's the Album; hand it here!
Exactly! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view!
I praise these poets: they leave margin-space;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot's confine,
Modest and maidlike; lubber prose o'er-sprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner? What comes first?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy!)
Or see—succincter beauty, brief and bold—
'*If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,*
He needs not despair Of dining well here—'
'*Here!*' I myself could find a better rhyme!
That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!
I'll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt.
A minute's fresh air, then to cipher-work!
Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarté, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
'Tis easy reckoning: I have lost, I think."

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that's parlour to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence;
—Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark
And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
Varnished and coffined, *Salmo ferox* glares
—Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room—
Vulgar flat smooth respectability:
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath
Of air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,
A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed patch
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close

For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
This inn is perched above to dominate—
Except such sign of human neighbourhood,
(And this surmised rather than sensible)
There's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature—which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself:
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast—
Close and convenient: here you have them both.
This inn, the Something-arms—the family's—
(Don't trouble Guillim:[1] heralds leave out half!)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
And epics have been planned here; but who plan
Take holy orders and find work to do.
Painters are more productive, stop a week,
Declare the prospect quite a Corot,—ay,
For tender sentiment,—themselves incline
Rather to handsweep large and liberal;
Then go, but not without success achieved
—Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
Also exhibited, this same May-month,
'*Foxgloves: a study*'—so inspires the scene,
The air, which now the younger personage
Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South
I' the distance where the green dies off to grey,
Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place;
He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

[1] Famous author on heraldry.

His fellow, the much older—either say
A youngish-old man or man oldish-young—
Sits at the table: wicks are noisome-deep
In wax, to detriment of plated ware;
Above—piled, strewn—is store of playing-cards,
Counters and all that's proper for a game.
He sets down, rubs out figures in the book,
Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work:
Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
By passage of the hard palm, curing so
Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space;
Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,
Such the sum-total—ask Colenso else!

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too—
The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps.

"Well, what's the damage—three, or four, or five?
How many figures in a row? Hand here!
Come now, there's one expense all yours not mine—
Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
The first and foremost too! You think, perhaps,
They'll only charge you for a brand-new book
Nor estimate the literary loss?
Wait till the small account comes! '*To one night's Lodging*,'—for 'beds,' they can't say,—'*pound or so; Dinner, Apollinaris,—what they please, Attendance not included;*' last looms large
'*Defacement of our Album, late enriched With*'—let's see what! Here, at the window, though!
Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck!
Fine enough country for a fool like me
To own, as next month I suppose I shall!

Eh? True fool's-fortune! so console yourself.
Let's see, however—hand the book, I say!
Well, you've improved the classic by romance.
Queer reading! Verse with parenthetic prose—
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Three-two fives) '*life how profitably spent*'
(Five-nought, five-nine fives) '*yonder humble cot,*'
(More and more noughts and fives) '*in mild content;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot!'
Then follow the dread figures—five! '*Content!*'
That's apposite! Are you content as he—
Simpkin the sonneteer? *Ten thousand pounds*
Give point to his effusion—by so much
Leave me the richer and the poorer you
After our night's play; who's content the most,
I, you, or Simpkin?"
So the polished snob.
The elder man, refinement every inch
From brow to boot-end, quietly replies:

"Simpkin's no name I know. I had my whim."

"Ay, had you! And such things make friendship thick.
Intimates I may boast we were; henceforth,
Friends—shall it not be?—who discard reserve,
Use plain words, put each dot upon each i,
Till death us twain do part? The bargain's struck!
Old fellow, if you fancy—(to begin—)
I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
Because you happen to be twice my age
And twenty times my master, must perforce
No blink of daylight struggle through the web
There's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
And welcome, for I like it: blind me,—no!
A very pretty piece of shuttle-work
Was that—your mere chance question at the club—
'*Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide?*
I'm off for Paris, there's the Opera—there's
The Salon, there's a china-sale,—beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together?' '*No such holiday!*'
I told you: '*Paris and the rest be hanged!*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights?
I'm the engaged now; through whose fault but yours?
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse
The week away down with the Aunt and Niece?
No help: it's leisure, loneliness and love.
Wish I could take you; but fame travels fast,'—
A man of much newspaper-paragraph,
You scare domestic circles; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds!
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions: but stay Sunday o'er,
And morning church is obligatory:
No mundane garb permissible, or dread
The butler's privileged monition! No!
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away!'
Whereon how artlessly the happy flash
Followed, by inspiration! ''*Tell you what—*
Let's turn their flank, try things on t'other side!
Inns for my money! Liberty's the life!
We'll lie in hiding: there's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,
Inn that's out—out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us—
Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive;
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart.
And while I'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (*since my Brother sulks*
And says I shun him like the plague) *yourself—*
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay
Despite the sleepless journey,—love lends wings,—
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait

The faithful advent! Eh?' 'With all my heart,'
Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
'Does he believe I fail to comprehend
He wants just one more final friendly snack
At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
And did I spoil sport, pull face grim,—nay, grave?
Your pupil does you better credit! No!
I parleyed with my pass-book,—rubbed my pair
At the big balance in my banker's hands,—
Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape,—just wants
Filling and signing,—and took train, resolved
To execute myself with decency
And let you win—if not Ten thousand quite,
Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst
Of firework-nosegay! Where's your fortune fled?
Or is not fortune constant after all?
You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half
Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think.
You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best
On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
How does the loss feel! Just one lesson more!"

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be—only boys like you
Put such a question at the present stage.
I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact;
Next day, I felt decidedly: and still,
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck!
And meantime please to stop impertinence,
For—don't I know its object? All this chaff
Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech,
This boy stands forth a hero. *'There, my lord!*
Our play was true play, fun not earnest! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke
Bulges to bursting? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be!
While I'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron: pshaw!
Enough! We've had a palpitating night!
Good morning! Breakfast and forget our dreams!
My mouth's shut, mind! I tell nor man nor mouse.'
There, see! He don't deny it! Thanks, my boy!
Hero and welcome—only, not on me
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand! Enough!
We've played, I've lost and owe ten thousand pounds,
Whereof I muster, at the moment,—well,
What's for the bill here and the back to town.
Still, I've my little character to keep:
You may expect your money at month's end."

The young man at the window turns round quick—
A clumsy giant handsome creature; grasps
In his large red the little lean white hand
Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

"I say now—is it right to so mistake
A fellow, force him in mere self-defence
To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity*
In album-language? You know well enough
Whether I like you—*like*'s no album-word
Anyhow: point me to one soul beside
In the wide world I care one straw about!
I first set eyes on you a year ago;
Since when you've done me good—I'll stick to it—
More than I got in the whole twenty-five
That make my life up, Oxford years and all—
Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
Seeing myself and nobody more sage
Until I met you, and you made me man
Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
I do think, since we two kept company,
I've learnt to know a little—all through you!
It's nature if I like you. Taunt away!
As if I need you teaching me my place—
The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
When just the good you did was—teaching me

My own trade, how a snob and millionaire
May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart
(That's album-style) are older than you know,
For all your knowledge: boy, perhaps—ay, boy
Had his adventure, just as he were man—
His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,
His bit of life-long ache to recognize,
Although he bears it cheerily about,
Because you came and clapped him on the back,
Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
Why, I was minded to sit down for life
Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower
High on a rock, and so expend my days
Pursuing chemistry or botany
Or, very like, astronomy because
I noticed stars shone when I passed the place:
Letting my cash accumulate the while
In England—to lay out in lump at last
As Ruskin should direct me! All or some
Of which should I have done or tried to do,
And preciously repented, one fine day,
Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock
And scaled his tower, some ten years thence, suppose,
And coaxed his story from him! Don't I see
The pair conversing! It's a novel writ
Already, I'll be bound,—our dialogue!
'*What?*' *cried the elder and yet youthful man—*
So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose
Contrasted with his interlocutor
The flabby low-born who, of bulk before,
Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
Since his abstention from horse-exercise:—
'*What? you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,*
London the very year you came of age,
Because your father manufactured goods—
Commission-agent hight of Manchester—
Partly, and partly through a baby case
Of disappointment I've pumped out at last—
And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
And giving science one more asteroid?'
Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,
At Alfred's and not Istria! proved a snob
May turn a million to account although
His brother be no Duke, and see good days
Without the girl he lost and someone gained.
The end is, after one year's tutelage,
Having, by your help, touched society,
Polo, Tent-pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink—
I leave all these delights, by your advice,
And marry my young pretty cousin here
Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.
(Her father was in partnership with mine—
Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
My million will be tails and tassels smart
To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land
Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
Along life's pleasant meadow,—arm left free
To lock a friend's in,—whose but yours, old boy?
Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards.
Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
(—Which I shall probably discover snug
Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,'—which, I swear,
By this time next month I shall quite forget
Whether I lost or won—ten thousand pounds,
Which at this instant I would give . . . let's see,
For Galopin[1]—nay, for that Gainsborough
Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,
Would get my glance and praise some twice a year,—)
Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake—
Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
My one discovered phœnix proves a goose,
My cleverest of all companions—oh,

[1] A racehorse.

Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!
Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts
Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
To bed—I can't say, since you needs must start
For station early—oh, the down-train still,
First plan and best plan—townward trip be hanged!
You're due at your big brother's—pay that debt,
Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs—
And who knows but there's trout obtainable?"

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then—

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:
I pay mine—debts of this sort—certainly.
What do I care how you regard your gains,
Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want
Is—not to have a story circulate
From club to club—how, bent on clearing out
Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
Then set the empty kennel flush again,
Ignored advantage and forgave his friend—
For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!
Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,
And the thinned company consists of six
Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
Next week, it's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.
I owe ten thousand pounds: I'll pay them!"

"Now,—
This becomes funny. You've made friends with me:
I can't help knowing of the ways and means!
Or stay! they say your brother closets up
Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means
To give you that, and if you give it me . . ."

"*I* polished snob off to aristocrat?
You compliment me! father's apron still
Sticks out from son's court-vesture; still silk purse
Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!
Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
I owe you and shall pay you: which premised,
Why should what follows sound like flattery?
The fact is—you do compliment too much
Your humble master, as I own I am;
You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
The polisher needs precious stone no less
Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
I struck no tint from out you but I found
Snug lying first 'neath surface hair-breadth-deep!
Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see,
I'm old and understand things: too absurd
It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,
That I myself misused a stone of price.
Born and bred clever—people used to say
Clever as most men, if not something more—
Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
Or left opaque,—no brilliant named and known.
Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside's blank;
I'm nobody—or rather, look that same—
I'm—who I am—and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
What ministry, what mission, or what book
—I'll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
I began—laughing—'*All these when I like!*'
I end with—well, you've hit it!—'*This boy's cheque*
For just as many thousands as he'll spare!'
The first—I could, and would not; your spare cash
I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,

But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine
—When you are able!"
"Which is—when to be?
I've heard, great characters require a fall
Of fortune to show greatness by uprise:
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
Add to the Album! Let a fellow share
Your secret of superiority!
I know, my banker makes the money breed
Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes
The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash,
While I do nothing but receive and spend.
But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
As Interest to me from egg of gold.
I am grown curious: pay me by all means!
How will you make the money?"
"Mind your own—
Not my affair. Enough: or money, or
Money's worth, as the case may be, expect
Ere month's end,—keep but patient for a month!
Who's for a stroll to station? Ten's the time;
Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
On platform, and you'll show the due fatigue
Of the night-journey,—not much sleep,—perhaps,
Your thoughts were on before you—yes, indeed,
You join them, being happily awake
With thought's sole object as she smiling sits
At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
In and out station-precinct, wile away
The hour till up my engine pants and smokes.
No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such saints!"

II.

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back.
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale—beyond
Tobacco's balm—the better smoke of turf
And wood fire,—cottages at cookery
I' the morning,—reach the main road straitening on
'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides,—May's the merry month.

They slacken pace: the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right; the station comes in view at end;
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say: let's halt, let's borrow yonder gate
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment! More
I think about and less I like the thing—
No, you must let me! Now, be good for once!
Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned!
We played for love, not hate: yes, hate! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord
Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
To lose—you knew that!—lose and none the less
Whistle to-morrow: it's not every chap
Affords to take his punishment so well!
Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault
Is that he thinks—upon my soul, I do—
Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees
Names in the newspaper—great this, great that,
Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate:—much I care!
Others have their opinion, I keep mine:

Which means—by right you ought to have the things
I want a head for. Here's a pretty place,
My cousin's place, and presently my place,
Not yours! I'll tell you how it strikes a man.
My cousin's fond of music and of course
Plays the piano (it won't be for long!)
A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,'
Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
And cost no end of money. Twice a week
Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,
Sets to work teaching—with his teeth on edge—
I've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate?*'
I ask: '*I rather think so*,' answers she—
'*He's What's-his-Name!*'—'*Why give you lessons then?*'—
'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*'—
'*This instrument, has he one such at home?*'—
'*He? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.'—'*I see!*
You've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here:
After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
Polkas on this piano of a Place
You'd make resound with *Rule Britannia!*"

"Thanks!
I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand
As key-board I might touch with some effect."

"Then, why not have obtained the like? House, land,
Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work: ask my father else!
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself?
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure
Pointing out blunders—'*Sharp, not natural!*
Permit me—on the black key use the thumb!'
There's some fatality, I'm sure! You say
'*Marry the cousin, that's your proper move!*'
And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp:
You should have listened to your own head's hint,
As I to you! The puzzle's past my power,
How you have managed—with such stuff, such means—
Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
Of which three good things where's a sign at all?
Just look at Dizzy![1] Come,—what tripped your heels?
Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!
I wager I have guessed it!—never found
The old solution of the riddle fail!
'*Who was the woman?*' I don't ask, but—
'*Where*
I' the path of life stood she who tripped you?'"

"Goose
You truly are! I own to fifty years.
Why don't I interpose and cut out—you?
Compete with five-and-twenty? Age, my boy!"

"Old man, no nonsense!—even to a boy
That's ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!
I've had my small adventure lesson me
Over the knuckles!—likely, I forget
The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years!"

"Aha?
Then that means—just the bullet in the blade
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain,—that, too,
Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend
Now for the first time to surmise as much!
Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret's safe
'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

[1] Mr. Disraeli.

"—Can't pretend,
Neither, to never have surmised your wish!
It's no use,—case of unextracted ball—
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be!"

"Ah, if you love your love still! I hate mine."

"I can't hate."

"I won't teach you; and won't tell
You, therefore, what you please to ask of me:
As if I, also, may not have my ache!"

"My sort of ache? No, no! and yet—perhaps!
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn! I say! Time's up! Good jump!
You old, indeed! I fancy there's a cut
Across the wood, a grass path: shall we try?
It's venturesome, however!"

"Stop, my boy!
Don't think I'm stingy of experience! Life
—It's like this wood we leave. Should you and I
Go wandering about there, though the gaps
We went in and came out by were opposed
As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
By nightfall we should probably have chanced
On much the same main points of interest—
Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
And so forth,—never mind what time betwixt.
So in our lives; allow I entered mine
Another way than you: 'tis possible
I ended just by knocking head against
That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began
By getting bump from; as at last you too
May stumble o'er that stump which first of all
Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
I, early old, played young man four years since
And failed confoundedly: so, hate alike
Failure and who caused failure,—curse her cant!"

"Oh, I see! You, though somewhat past the prime,
Were taken with a rosebud beauty! Ah—
But how should chits distinguish? She admired
Your marvel of a mind, I'll undertake!
But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,
When years have told on face and figure . . ."

"Thanks,
Mister *Sufficiently-Instructed!* Such
No doubt was bound to be the consequence
To suit your self-complacency: she liked
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top
After my young friend's fashion! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found
A formidable peer at twenty-one?
So much for your mock-modesty! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success!
It's odd: my case occurred four years ago—
I finished just while you commenced that turn
I' the wood of life that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast: it's bad style, and beside,
The feat proves easier than it looks: I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though!)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff
Rather than Ess or Psidium,[1] that I chanced
On what—so far from '*rosebud beauty*' . . .
Well—
She's dead: at least you never heard her name;

[1] Scents.

She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding—mere fine-lady-breeding; but
Oh, such a wonder of a woman! Grand
As a Greek statue! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen,—you know,
Artists would make an outcry: all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault
(Don't laugh!) was just perfection: for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.
At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath
A Venus' forehead with his whittling-knife—
I wish,—now,—I had played that brute, brought blood
To surface from the depths I fancied chalk!
As it was, her mere face surprised so much
That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as stares
The cockney stranger at a certain bust
With drooped eyes,—she's the thing I have in mind,—
Down at my Brother's. All sufficient prize—
Such outside! Now,—confound me for a prig!—
Who cares? I'll make a clean breast once for all!
Beside, you've heard the gossip. My life long
I've been a woman-liker,—liking means
Loving and so on. There's a lengthy list
By this time I shall have to answer for—
So say the good folk: and they don't guess half—
For the worst is, let once collecting-itch
Possess you, and, with perspicacity,
Keeps growing such a greediness that theft
Follows at no long distance,—there's the fact!
I knew that on my Leporello[1]-list
Might figure this, that, and the other name
Of feminine desirability,
But if I happened to desire inscribe,
Along with these, the only Beautiful—
Here was the unique specimen to snatch
Or now or never. 'Beautiful' I said—
'Beautiful' say in cold blood,—boiling then
To tune of '*Haste, secure whate'er the cost*
This rarity, die in the act, be damned,
So you complete collection, crown your list!'
It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused
By the first notice of such wonder's birth,
Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
The first discoverer, should she but emerge
From that safe den of darkness where she dozed
Till I stole in, that country-parsonage
Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless,
Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
She had been vegetating lily-like.
Her father was my brother's tutor, got
The living that way: him I chanced to see—
Her I saw—her the world would grow one eye
To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!
'*Secure her!*' cried the devil: '*afterward*
Arrange for the disposal of the prize!'
The devil's doing! yet I seem to think—
Now, when all's done,—think with '*a head reposed*'
In French phrase—hope I think I meant to do
All requisite for such a rarity
When I should be at leisure, have due time
To learn requirement. But in evil day—
Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
The father must begin '*Young Somebody,*
Much recommended—for I break a rule—
Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.'
'*Young!*'
That did it. Had the epithet been '*rich,*'
'*Noble,*' '*a genius,*' even '*handsome,*'—but
—'*Young*'!"

"I say—just a word! I want to know—
You are not married?"

"I?"

"Nor ever were?"

"Never! Why?"

[1] Don Giovanni's valet.

"Oh, then—never mind! Go on!
I had a reason for the question."

"Come,—
You could not be the young man?"

"No, indeed!
Certainly—if you never married her!"

"That I did not: and there's the curse, you'll see!
Nay, all of it's one curse, my life's mistake
Which, nourished with manure that's warranted
To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness!
The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman—not so much believed, I'll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth:
Since being true, devoted, constant—she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.
No mock-heroics but seemed natural
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far
Beyond the common,—and a mind to match,—
Not made to puzzle conjurers like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest!
'*Trust me!*' I said: she trusted. '*Marry me!*'
Or rather, '*We are married: when, the rite?*'
That brought on the collector's next-day qualm
At counting acquisition's cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure:
Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand—
To cage as well as catch my rarity!
So, I began explaining. At first word
Outbroke the horror. '*Then, my truths were lies!*'
I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange
All-unsuspected revelation—soul
As supernaturally grand as face
Was fair beyond example—that at once
Either I lost—or, if it please you, found
My senses,—stammered somehow—'*Jest! and now,*
Earnest! Forget all else but—heart has loved,
Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!'
Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
Contempt incarnate!"

"Yes, it's different,—
It's only like in being four years since.
I see now!"

"Well, what did disdain do next,
Think you?"

"That's past me: did not marry you!—
That's the main thing I care for, I suppose.
Turned nun, or what?"

"Why, married in a month
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-chinned sort
Of curate-creature, I suspect,—dived down,
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else—
I don't know where—I've not tried much to know,—
In short, she's happy: what the clodpoles call
'Countrified' with a vengeance! leads the life
Respectable and all that drives you mad:
Still—where, I don't know, and that's best for both."

"Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
But why should you hate her, I want to know?"

"My good young friend,—because or her or else
Malicious Providence I have to hate.
For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
Of my whole life and fortune toward success
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault

Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,
But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw
And I strike out afresh and so be saved.
It's easy saying—I had sunk before,
Disqualified myself by idle days
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
On cable, even, had fate cast me such!
You boys don't know how many times men fail
Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,
Collect the whole power for the final pounce.
My fault was the mistaking man's main prize
For intermediate boy's diversion; clap
Of boyish hands here frightened game away
Which, once gone, goes for ever. Oh, at first
I took the anger easily, nor much
Minded the anguish—having learned that storms
Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
Somewhat amiss; precipitation, eh?
Reason and rhyme prompt—reparation! Tiffs
End properly in marriage and a dance!
I said 'We'll marry, make the past a blank'—
And never was such damnable mistake!
That interview, that laying bare my soul,
As it was first, so was it last chance—one
And only. Did I write? Back letter came
Unopened as it went. Inexorable
She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself
With the smug curate-creature: chop and change!
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,
Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,'—as someone says.
And now, he's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!"

"Well, but your turning-point of life,—what's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton,[1] next election? I don't see . . ."

"Not you! But *I* see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction—here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
—That with her—may be, for her—I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood—
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well,—
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side!
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown forbids:
The steam congeals once more: I'm old again!
Therefore I hate myself—but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things—no, but sent a-slide
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon—the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure—lose my temper in the act . . ."

"And lose beside,—if I may supplement
The list of losses,—train and ten-o'clock!
Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign!
So much the better! You're my captive now!
I'm glad you trust a fellow: friends grow thick
This way—that's twice said; we were thickish, though,
Even last night, and, ere night comes again,

[1] Arthur Orton, the Tichborne claimant.

I prophesy good luck to both of us !
For see now !—back to '*balmy eminence*'
Or '*calm acclivity*,' or what's the word !
Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease
A sonnet for the Album, while I put
Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,
March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth—
(Even white-lying goes against my taste
After your little story). Oh, the niece
Is rationality itself ! The aunt—
If she's amenable to reason too—
Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect,
And let the Duke wait (I'll work well the Duke).
If she grows gracious, I return for you ;
If thunder's in the air, why—bear your doom,
Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust
Of aunty from your shoes as off you go
By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought
How you shall pay me—that's as sure as fate,
Old fellow ! Off with you, face left about !
Yonder's the path I have to pad. You see,
I'm in good spirits, God knows why ! Perhaps
Because the woman did not marry you
—Who look so hard at me,—and have the right,
One must be fair and own."

The two stand still
Under an oak.

"Look here !" resumes the youth.
"I never quite knew how I came to like
You—so much—whom I ought not court at all :
Nor how you had a leaning just to me
Who am assuredly not worth your pains.
For there must needs be plenty such as you
Somewhere about,—although I can't say where,—
Able and willing to teach all you know ;
While—how can you have missed a score like me
With money and no wit, precisely each
A pupil for your purpose, were it—ease
Fool's poke of tutor's *honorarium*-fee ?
And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt
At once my master : you as prompt descried
Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run
Sometimes so close together they converge—
Life's great adventures—you know what I mean—
In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
It got to be uncommonly like fact
We two had fallen in with—liked and loved
Just the same woman in our different ways ?
I began life—poor groundling as I prove—
Winged and ambitious to fly high : why not ?
There's something in 'Don Quixote' to the point,
My shrewd old father used to quote and praise—
'*Am I born man ?*' asks Sancho : '*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope !'
So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
And step, whereof the first should be to find
A perfect woman ; and I tell you this—
If what I fixed on, in the order due
Of undertakings, as next step, had first
Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
And I had been, the day I came of age,
Returned at head of poll for Westminster
—Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen
At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit,
To form and head a Tory ministry—
It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
More strange to me, as now I estimate,
Than what did happen—sober truth, no dream.
I saw my wonder of a woman,—laugh,
I'm past that !—in Commemoration-week.
A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul,—
With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink ;
But one to match that marvel—no least trace,
Least touch of kinship and community !
The end was—I did somehow state the fact,
Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
One way or other give to understand
That woman, soul and body were her slave

Would she but take, but try them—any test
Of will, and some poor test of power beside:
So did the strings within my brain grow tense
And capable of . . . hang similitudes!
She answered kindly but beyond appeal.
'*No sort of hope for me, who came too late.*
She was another's. Love went—mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to someone else.'
Of course! I might expect it! Nature's law—
Given the peerless woman, certainly
Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match!
I acquiesced at once, submitted me
In something of a stupor, went my way.
I fancy there had been some talk before
Of somebody—her father or the like—
To coach me in the holidays,—that's how
I came to get the sight and speech of her,—
But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there!"

"Eh?
Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
The lovers—*I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While
I never plucked up courage to inquire
Who he was, even,—certain-sure of this,
That nobody I knew of had blue wings
And wore a star-crown as he needs must do,—
Some little lady,—plainish, pock-marked girl,—
Finds out my secret in my woeful face,
Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
And pityingly pours her wine and oil
This way into the wound: '*Dear f-f-friend,*
Why waste affection thus on—must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who's her choice—
Irrevocable as deliberate—
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names—
But there's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown grey
In idleness and sin of every sort
Except hypocrisy: he's thrice her age,
A by-word for "successes with the sex"
As the French say—and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since—show me where's the woman won without
The help of this one lie which she believes—
That—never mind how things have come to pass,
And let who loves have loved a thousand times—
All the same he now loves her only, loves
Her ever! if by "won" you just mean "sold,"
That's quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
Continuing descent from bad to worse,
Must leave his fine and fashionable prey
(*Who—fathered, brothered, husbanded,—are hedged*
About with thorny danger) *and apply*
His arts to this poor country ignorance
Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man
Her model hero! Why continue waste
On such a woman treasures of a heart
Would yet find solace,—yes, my f-f-friend—
In some congenial—fiddle-diddle-dee?'"

"Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
Exact the portrait which my '*f-f-friends*'
Recognize as so like? 'Tis evident
You half surmised the sweet original
Could be no other than myself, just now!
Your stop and start were flattering!"

"Of course
Caricature's allowed for in a sketch!
The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
The swarthy cheek gets copper-coloured,—still,
Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts:
And '*parson's daughter*'—'*young man coachable*'—
'*Elderly party*'—'*four years since*'—were facts

To fasten on, a moment! Marriage, though—
That made the difference, I hope."

"All right!
I never married; wish I had—and then
Unwish it: people kill their wives, sometimes!
I hate my mistress, but I'm murder-free.
In your case, where's the grievance? You came last,
The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose
You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
Had happened to precede myself! 'tis odds
But this gigantic juvenility,
This offering of a big arm's bony hand—
I'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know—
Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
An altogether new Ideal—deem
Idolatry less due to life's decline
Productive of experience, powers mature
By dint of usage, the made man—no boy
That's all to make! I was the earlier bird—
And what I found, I let fall; what you missed
Who is the fool that blames you for?"

"Myself—
For nothing, everything! For finding out
She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper
In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
She married him—the fifty-years-old rake—
How you have teased the talk from me! At last
My secret's told you. I inquired no more,
Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;
Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
Married and happy, or else miserable—
It's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole
Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence
Badger-like,—'*Back to London*' was the word—
'*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,*
I'll undertake are easy!'—the advice.
I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you—
(Little hand holding large hand pretty tight
For all its delicacy—eh, my lord?),
Until when, t'other day, I got a turn
Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!* bade you,
'*Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means!' So, I loll
On this the springy sofa, mine next month—
Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
The very down you spread me out so smooth.
I wish this confidence were still to make!
Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum
For stirring up the black depths! There's repose
Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
All that one has to bear; but folly—yes,
Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,
So humble,—such a coward rather say!
Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!
Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint)
My big and bony, here, against the bunch
Of lily-coloured five with signet-ring,
Most like, for little-finger's sole defence—
Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind
My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think—
To know I might have made that woman mine
But for the folly of the coward—know—
Or what's the good of my apprenticeship
This twelvemonth to a master in the art?
Mine—had she been mine—just one moment mine
For honour, for dishonour—anyhow,
So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
You've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep—
Hang you!"

"Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!
All this means—I who since I knew you first
Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock
O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose—
Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped

By chick that wanted prompting '*Use the spur!*'
While I was elsewhere putting mine to use.
As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
Never advised me '*Do as I have done*
Reverence such a jewel as your luck
Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness!'
As your behaviour was should mine have been,
—Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for:
Opposite ages, each with its mistake!
'*If youth but would—if age but could*,' you know.
Don't let us quarrel. Come, we're—young and old—
Neither so badly off. Go you your way,
Cut to the Cousin! I'll to Inn, await
The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,
And wait my hour on '*calm acclivity*'
In rumination manifold—perhaps
About ten thousand pounds I have to pay!"

III.

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
Conducive to resource, and saunteringly
Betakes him to the left-hand backward path,—
While, much sedate, the younger strides away
To right and makes for—islanded in lawn
And edged with shrubbery—the brilliant bit
Of Barry's building that's the Place,—a pair
Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
One very young, are ushered with due pomp
Into the same Inn-parlour—"*disengaged*
Entirely now!" the obsequious landlord smiles,
"*Since the late occupants—whereof but one*
Was quite a stranger"—(smile enforced by bow)
"*Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,*
Probably for the stranger's sake!" (Bow, smile,
And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,
Begin their talk: the girl, with sparkling eyes—
"Oh, I forewent him purposely! but you,
Who joined at—journeyed from the Junction here—
I wonder how he failed your notice. Few
Stop at our station: fellow-passengers
Assuredly you were—I saw indeed
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
Inside here first of all, so dodged about
The dark end of the platform; that's his way—
To swing from station straight to avenue
And stride the half a mile for exercise.
I fancied you might notice the huge boy.
He soon gets o'er the distance; at the house
He'll hear I went to meet him and have missed;
He'll wait. No minute of the hour's too much
Meantime for our preliminary talk:
First word of which must be—O good beyond
Expression of all goodness—you to come!"

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

"There was no helping that. You called for me,
Cried, rather: and my old heart answered you.
Still, thank me! since the effort breaks a vow—
At least, a promise to myself."

"I know!
How selfish get you happy folk to be!
If I should love my husband, must I needs
Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
As you do? Must I never dare leave house
On this dread Arctic expedition, out
And in again, six mortal hours, though you,
You even, my own friend for evermore,
Adjure me—fast your friend till rude love pushed
Poor friendship from her vantage—just to grant
The quarter of a whole day's company
And counsel? This makes counsel so much more
Need and necessity. For here's my block
Of stumbling: in the face of happiness
So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
In heart be but love's easy consequence,
Do I love? If to marry mean—let go
All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
On the great elm-tree in the open, posed
Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
And leafage, one green plenitude of May.
The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness, — squirrel, bee and bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
'*Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step Heavenward!*'—so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl—

"That's saved then: marriage spares the early taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you said,
From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held
Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed—
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder—otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm —
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever!"

"Yes:
I think that likely. I could well dispense
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by—
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labour earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep."

"How you must know he loves you! Chill, before,
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice—
Assured my lover simply loves my soul—
One nose-breadth of fair feature? No, indeed!
Your own love . . ."

"The preliminary hour—
Don't waste it!"

"But I can't begin at once!
The angel's self that comes to hear me speak
Drives away all the care about the speech.
What an angelic mystery you are—
Now—that is certain! when I knew you first,
No break of halo and no bud of wing!
I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,
You vanished, how and whither? Mystery!
Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,
Were loved again, and left the world of course:
Who would not? Lapped four years in fairy-land,
Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss
Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice
That's now struck dumb at her own potency.
I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours
Rather! The fool I ever was—I am,
You see that: the true friend you ever had,
You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
Giving you all the love of all my heart,
Nature, that's niggard in me, has denied
The after-birth of love there's someone claims
—This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;

And I want counsel: is defect in me,
Or him who has no right to raise the love?
My cousin asks my hand: he's young enough,
Handsome,—my maid thinks,—manly's more the word:
He asked my leave to '*drop*' the elm-tree there,
Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
Goes with the strength, of course. He's honest too,
Limpidly truthful. For ability—
All's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:
He travelled, tried things—came back, tried still more—
He says he's sick of all. He's fond of me
After a certain careless-earnest way
I like: the iron's crude,—no polished steel
Somebody forged before me. I am rich—
That's not the reason, he's far richer: no,
Nor is it that he thinks me pretty,—frank
Undoubtedly on that point! He saw once
The pink of face-perfection—oh, not you—
Content yourself, my beauty!—for she proved
So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
He runs into extremes, I'll say at once,
Lest you say! Well, I understand he wants
Someone to serve, something to do: and both
Requisites so abound in me and mine
That here's the obstacle which stops consent:
The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust
The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me,*
Who, judging for herself succeeded so!'
Do I love him, does he love me, do both
Mistake for knowledge—easy ignorance?
Appeal to its proficient in each art!
I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,
Rattled away last week till tutor came,
Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott!*
Sagen Sie "easy"? Every note is wrong.
All thumped mit wrist: we'll trouble fingers now.
The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again
And exercise at Czerny for one month!'
Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
At Trollope's novels for one month? Pronounce!"

"Now, place each in the right position first,
Adviser and advised one! I perhaps
Am three—nay, four years older; am, beside,
A wife: advantages—to balance which,
You have a full fresh joyous sense of life
That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,
Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
Your merest glimpses at the world without
Have shown you more than ever met my gaze;
And now, by joyance you inspire joy,—learn
While you profess to teach, and teach, although
Avowedly a learner. I am dazed
Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
The sparrow preening plumage! Here's to spy
—Your cousin! You have scanned him all your life,
Little or much; I never saw his face.
You have determined on a marriage—used
Deliberation therefore—I'll believe
No otherwise, with opportunity
For judgment so abounding! Here stand I—
Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim,
(Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
Judge what is strangeness' self to me,—say '*Wed!*'
Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge
Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
While he carves chicken! Sends he leg for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me! Quite as well
Consult with yonder solitary crow
That eyes us from your elm-top!"

"Still the same!
Do you remember, at the library

We saw together somewhere, those two books
Somebody said were noticeworthy? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves
For all the world's inspection; shut on shelf
Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked—
Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold
Inside you secrets written,—soul-absorbed,
My ink upon your blotting-paper. *I*—
What trace of you have I to show in turn?
Delicate secrets! No one juvenile
Ever essayed at croquet and performed
Superiorly but I confided you
The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
While you? One day a calm note comes by post:
'*I am just married, you may like to hear.*'
Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love
What we fear,—*I* do! '*Cold*' I shall expect
My cousin calls you. I—dislike not him,
But (if I comprehend what loving means)
Love you immeasurably more—more—more
Than even he who, loving you his wife,
Would turn up nose at who impertinent,
Frivolous, forward—*loves* that excellence
Of all the earth he bows in worship to!
And who's this paragon of privilege?
Simply a country parson: his the charm
That worked the miracle! Oh, too absurd
But that you stand before me as you stand!
Such beauty does prove something, everything!
Beauty's the prize-flower which dispenses eye
From peering into what has nourished root—
Dew or manure: the plant best knows its place.
Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
And hearing sermons,—haply writing tracts,—
From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,
Out blows this triumph! Therefore love's the soil
Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,
Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize
This cousin! Surely he's as worth your pains
To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,
You still keep staring at. I read your thoughts."

"At last?"

"At first! '*Would, tree, a-top of thee*
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best—
The parson o'er his parish—garish—rarish—'
Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:
The Album here inspires me! Quite apart
From lyrical expression, have I read
The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"
"Or rather *so?* '*Cool comfortable elm*
That men make coffins out of,—none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,
You are a guesser, not a '*clairvoyante.*'
I'll so far open you the locked and shelved
Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,
As let you profit by the title-page——"

"*Paradise Lost?*"

"*Inferno!*—All which comes
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here!
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
Come at your call, be sure that I will do
All your requirement—see and say my mind.
It may be that by sad apprenticeship
I have a keener sense: I'll task the same.
Only indulge me—here let sight and speech
Happen—this Inn is neutral ground, you know!

I cannot visit the old house and home,
Encounter the old sociality
Abjured for ever. Peril quite enough
In even this first—last, I pray it prove—
Renunciation of my solitude!
Back, you, to house and cousin! Leave me here,
Who want no entertainment, carry still
My occupation with me. While I watch
The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
Tell him '*A school-friend wants a word with me*
Up at the inn: time, tide and train won't wait:
I must go see her—on and off again—
You'll keep me company?' Ten minutes' talk,
With you in presence, ten more afterward
With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,
And I see clearly—and say honestly
To-morrow: pen shall play tongue's part, you know.
Go—quick! for I have made our hand-in-hand
Return impossible. So scared you look,—
If cousin does not greet you with '*What ghost*
Has crossed your path?' I set him down obtuse."

And after one more look, with face still white,
The younger does go, while the elder stands
Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV.

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
Five inches further to the South, the door
Opens abruptly, someone enters sharp,
The elder man returned to wait the youth:
Never observes the room's new occupant,
Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped
Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then,—with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose
Air of defiance to fate visibly
Casting the toils about him,—mouths once more
"*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*"
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T'other side table, looks up, starts erect
Full-face with her who,—roused from that abstruse
Question, "*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*",—
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,
Away withers at once the weariness
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate
Convulse. Speech follows slowlier, but at last—

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
Knew, by some subtle undivinable
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
My torment due on four years' respite! Time
To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound!
Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
When I shall think to glide into the grave,
There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
And catch and capture me for evermore!
But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
He neither gasps nor hisses: calm and plain—

"I also felt and knew—but otherwise!
You out of hand and sight and care of me
These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
Oh, it's no superstition! It's a gift
O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked,

Lay perdue paralysing me,—drugged, drowsed
And damnified my soul and body both!
Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
You and your malice! I was, four years since,
—Well, a poor creature! I become a knave.
I squandered my own pence: I plump my purse
With other people's pounds. I practised play
Because I liked it: play turns labour now
Because there's profit also in the sport.
I gamed with men of equal age and craft:
I steal here with a boy as green as grass
Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
This long while, just to bring about to-day
When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
O time indeed I should look up and laugh
'*Surely she closes on me!*' Here you stand!"

And stand she does: while volubility,
With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
After long locking-up is loosed for once.

"Certain the taunt is happy!" he resumes:
"So, I it was allured you—only I
—I, and none other—to this spectacle—
Your triumph, my despair—you woman-fiend
That front me! Well, I have my wish, then! See
The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn black
Not asleep now! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
Either great bridging eyebrow—poor blank beads—
Babies, I've pleased to pity in my time:
How they protrude and glow immense with hate!
The long triumphant nose attains—retains
Just the perfection; and there's scarlet-skein
My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,
Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and bold
Because of chin, that based resolve beneath!
Then the columnar neck completes the whole
Greek-sculpture-baffling body! Do I see?
Can I observe? You wait next word to come?
Well, wait and want! since no one blight I bid
Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
As they are rightly shocking now to me,
So may they still continue! Value them?
Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth
Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,
And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!
You have absolved me from my sin at least!
You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,
No touch of the tame timid nullity
My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!
Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
I never doubted all was joke. I kept,
May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,
Newspaper-notice,—let no inquest slip,
Accident, disappearance: sound and safe
Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!
So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep
Was '*Into what dim hole can she have dived,*
She and her wrongs, her woe that's wearing flesh
And blood away?' Whereas, see, sorrow swells!
Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me,
Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,
O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept from you
To me that craze, else unaccountable,
Which urged me to contest our county-seat
With whom but my own brother's nominee?
Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine
While I misused my moment, pushed,—one word,—
One hair's breadth more of gesture,—idiot-like

Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
And lost the heiress in a grin? At least,
You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,
Landed your prize the true artistic way!
How did the smug young curate rise to tune
Of '*Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love*
Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,
Betrayal: past is past; the future—yours—
Shall never be contaminate by mine.
I might have spared me this confession, not
—Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,
Easy, impenetrable! No! but say,
By just the quiet answer—"I am cold."
Falsehood avaunt, each shadow of thee, hence!
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams
are vain.
Now, leave me—yes, for pity's sake!' Aha,
Who fails to see the curate as his face
Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief
At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
Out burst the proper '*Angel, whom the fiend*
Has thought to smirch,—thy whiteness, at one
wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan!
Mine be the task' . . . and so forth! Fool?
not he!
Cunning in flavours, rather! What but sour
Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,
And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps—
'*Love's flame in me by such recited wrong*
Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the
fiercelier thence!'
Why, I have known men never love their
wives
Till somebody — myself, suppose — had
'*drenched*
And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined:
as if
The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb
Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
No palsied person: half my age, or less,
The curate was, I'll wager: o'er young blood
Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but—was it *he?*
Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!
How frank you were about the audacious boy
Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt—
Passion and protestation! He it was
Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and '*rich*' beside—
'*Rich*'—how supremely did disdain curl
nose!
All that I heard was—'*wedded to a priest;*'
Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
And so my lawless love disparted loves,
That loves might come together with a rush!
Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:
Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-
queen,
Be merciful and let your subject slink
Into dark safety! He's a beggar, see—
Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound,
And bid her land him right amid some crowd
Of creditors, assembled by your curse!
Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can!)
Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence,
just
The moment when he hoped to hang himself!
Be satisfied you beat him!"

She replies—

"Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
Of abject failure, I extend belief.
Your very face confirms it: God is just!
Let my face—fix your eyes!—in turn confirm
What I shall say. All-abject's but half truth;
Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!
So is it you probed human nature, *so*
Prognosticated of me? Lay these words
To heart then, or where God meant heart
should lurk!
That moment when you first revealed your-
self,
My simple impulse prompted—end forthwith
The ruin of a life uprooted thus
To surely perish! How should such spoiled
tree
Henceforward baulk the wind of its worst
sport,
Fail to go falling deeper, falling down
From sin to sin until some depth were reached
Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,
That self-display made absolute,—behold
A new revealment!—round you pleased to
veer,

Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*'—in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me—'*marry*' these!
Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I—thank God!—at the contemptible,
Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place,
I was not destined to the shame below.
A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last
Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage—no!
'*Bare breast be on hard rock*,' laughed out my soul
In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*
The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice
This wreck of me!' The wind,—I broke in bloom
At passage of,—which stripped me bole and branch,
Twisted me up and tossed me here,—turns back,
And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?
Be satisfied, not one least leaf that's mine
Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!
Rather I give such remnant to the rock
Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.
Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
Even: enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind,—
Now that I know if God or Satan be
Prince of the Power of the Air,—then, then, indeed,
Let my life end and degradation too!"

"Good!" he smiles, "true Lord Byron! '*Tree and rock*:'
'*Rock*'—there's advancement! He's at first a youth,
Rich, worthless therefore; next he grows a priest:
Youth, riches prove a notable resource,
When to leave me for their possessor gluts
Malice abundantly; and now, last change,
The young rich parson represents a rock
—Bloodstone, no doubt. He's Evangelical?
Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse!"

She speaks.

"I have a story to relate.
There was a parish-priest, my father knew,
Elderly, poor: I used to pity him
Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.
Elderly was grown old now, scanty means
Were straitening fast to poverty, beside
The ailments which await in such a case.
Limited every way, a perfect man
Within the bounds built up and up since birth
Breast-high about him till the outside world
Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky—
Faith: he had faith in dogma, small or great,
As in the fact that if he clave his skull
He'd find a brain there: who proves such a fact
No falsehood by experiment at price
Of soul and body? The one rule of life
Delivered him in childhood was '*Obey! Labour!*' He had obeyed and laboured—tame,
True to the mill-track blinked on from above.
Some scholarship he may have gained in youth:
Gone—dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,
Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head,
I used to think; but January joins
December, as his year had known no May
Trouble its snow-deposit,—cold and old!
I heard it was his will to take a wife,
A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach—
How? with experience null, nor sympathy
Abundant,—while himself worked dogma dead,
Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,

Womankind, childhood? These demand a wife.
Supply the want, then! theirs the wife; for him—
No coarsest sample of the proper sex
But would have served his purpose equally
With God's own angel,—let but knowledge match
Her coarseness: zeal does only half the work.
I saw this—knew the purblind honest drudge
Was wearing out his simple blameless life,
And wanted help beneath a burthen—borne
To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I?
Partner he needed: I proposed myself,
Nor much surprised him—duty was so clear!
Gratitude? What for? Gain of Paradise—
Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
Of who hides talent in a napkin? No:
His scruple was—should I be strong enough
—In body? since of weakness in the mind,
Weariness in the heart—no fear of these!
He took me as these Arctic voyagers
Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:
Can he endure them?—that's the point, and not
—Will he? Who would not, rather! Whereupon,
I pleaded far more earnestly for leave
To give myself away, than you to gain
What you called priceless till you gained the heart
And soul and body! which, as beggars serve
Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.
Not so my husband,—for I gained my suit,
And had my value put at once to proof.
Ask him! These four years I have died away
In village-life. The village? Ugliness
At best and filthiness at worst, inside.
Outside, sterility—earth sown with salt
Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
That commonplace to such stupidity
Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts
And kindly cluckings, no articulate
Nonsense that's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the sick,
Sickened myself at pig-perversity,
Cat-craft, dog-snarling, — may be, snapping . . ."

"Brief:
You eat that root of bitterness called Man
—Raw: I prefer it cooked, with social sauce!
So, he was not the rich youth after all!
Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
The compensation. If not young nor rich . . ."

"You interrupt."

"Because you've daubed enough
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
Produce your figure well-relieved in front!
The contrast—do not I anticipate?
Though neither rich nor young—what then?
'Tis all
Forgotten, all this ignobility,
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
The something sweeter . . ."

"Yes, you interrupt.
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Selfishness
In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent
On saving his own soul by saving theirs,—
They, bent on being saved if saving soul
Included body's getting bread and cheese
Somehow in life and somehow after death,—
Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.
Safety induces culture: culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now; progress means
What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close.
No new books,—were the old ones mastered yet?
No pictures and no music: these divert

—What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings—stopped
Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound—
Vainly: the sound and sense would penetrate
To brain and plague there in despite of me
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I' the '*Green*' they call their grimy,—I with twang
Of long-disused guitar,—with cut and slash
Of much-misvalued horsewhip he,—to bid
The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas—Heaven and Hell,
Excite with that, restrain with this! So dealt
His drugs my husband; as he dosed himself,
He drenched his cattle: and, for all my part
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed:
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking—as to what's
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary: there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life: man created new, ingeniously
Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory
Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart;
New gift of observation up and down
And round man's self, new power to apprehend
Each necessary consequence of act
In man for well or ill—things obsolete—
Just granted to supplant the idiocy
Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
With ill or well momentously its fruit;
A faculty of immense suffering
Conferred on mind and body,—mind, erewhile
Unvisited by one compunctious dream
During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
Stung through and through by sin's significance
Now that the holy was abolished—just
As body which, alive, broke down beneath
Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
Achieve aught worthy,—which grew old in youth,
And at its longest fell a cut-down flower,—
Dying, this too revived by miracle
To bear no end of burthen now that back
Supported torture to no use at all,
And live imperishably potent—since
Life's potency was impotent to ward
One plague off which made earth a hell before.
This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
One sane sight of the general ordinance—
Nature,—and its particular object,—man,—
Which one mere eye-cast at the character
Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
Had dissipated once and evermore,—
This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire
Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day
The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids
Defy the other? All the harm is done
Ourselves—done my poor husband who in youth
Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead—
Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality—
Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,
But she continues.

"—Life which, thanks once more
To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,
I acquiescingly—I gratefully
Take back again to heart! and hence this speech
Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life—I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me,
A friend's first summons, first provocative,
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit, though for a single day, my house
Of bondage—made return seem horrible.
I heard again a human lucid laugh
All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,
Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few flowers,—
Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush
Repeated his old music-phrase,—all right,
How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul: which sprang
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed
'*Failure.*' No love more? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize! or, if none be,—
Nor second world nor chance,—undesecrate
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank!
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed
As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness
Had I called beauty, falsehood—truth, and you
—My lover! No—this earth's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is
Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation —earth.
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit
I wish myself had proved as teachable!
—Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours—the immeasurably superior! I
Believed at least in one thing, first to last,—
Your love to me: I was the vile and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,
But doubted—never! Why else go my way
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my ear
And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment*
Is just!' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith
To pay with falsehood! For, my heart knows this—
Love once and you love always. Why, it's down
Here in the Album: every lover knows
Love may use hate but—turn to hate, itself—
Turn even to indifference—no, indeed!
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man
Who bids him wither: so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide,—and all the woe because
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,

Was just a feather-phantom! I wronged love,
Am ruined,—and there was no love to wrong!"

"No love? Ah, dead love! I invoke thy ghost
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence! Not love, my love?
I changed for you the very laws of life:
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage,
No sufferer—which is grandest—for the truth!
My hero—where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day!
Age and decline were man's maturity;
Face, form were nature's type: more grace, more strength,
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence? I have danced through day
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile!
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence; in companionship,
I kept my finger constant to your glove
Glued to my breast; then—where was all the world?
I schemed—not dreamed—how I might die some death
Should save your finger aching! Who creates
Destroys, he only: I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy: you yourself
Only could do that! With a touch 'twas done.
'*Give me all, trust me wholly!*' At the word,
I did give, I did trust—and thereupon
The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully-folded arm in arm,
As trick obtained its triumph one time more!
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat:
Treason like faith moves mountains: love is gone!"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close
And calls her by her name. Then—

"God forgives:
Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near
As never priests could bring him to this soul
That prays you both—forgive me! I abase—
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment; but as God
Gives me this knowledge—heart to feel and tongue
To testify—so be you gracious too!
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of—well, they do say and I can believe—
The devil in him: his, the moment,—mine
The life—your life!"

He names her name again.

"You were just—merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite: punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,
The patient thanks decision, promptitude,
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt,
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All's well that ends well!"

Yet again her name.

"Had *you* no fault? Why must you change, forsooth,
Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play?
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low?
Wherefore did God exalt you? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence
Must never drop the dominating eye:
Wink—and what wonder if the mad fit break,
Followed by stripes and fasting? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.

Accept, redeem me! Do your eyes ask '*How?*'
I stand here penniless, a beggar; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings? when each bubble-scheme
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,
The worse the better,—of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows,—when these fancies fade away
At first sight of the lost so long, the found
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile—
That family of snakes your eye bids flee!
Listen! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight: I awake, and dream is—where?
I rouse up from the past: one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,
The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage,—there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
Is or should be the best of life,—its fruit,
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
Of soul's achievement,—when the strong man doubts
His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine.
What if the lover may elude, no more
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse: I breathe again: I love!
Tempted, I fell; but fallen—fallen lie
Here at your feet, see! Leave this poor pretence
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere
Man-mask as — whom you witless wrong, beside,
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree
If watered with your life-blood: rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves—sends to flower and fruit at last
The laggard virtue in the soul which else
Cumbers the ground! Quicken me! Call me yours—
Yours and the world's—yours and the world's and God's!
Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed
The castaway you count me,—all the more
Apparent shall the angelic potency
Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps
To light and life and love!—that's love for you—
Love that already dares match might with yours.
You loved one worthy,—in your estimate,—
When time was; you descried the unworthy taint,
And where was love then? No such test could e'er
Try my love: but you hate me and revile;
Hatred, revilement—had you these to bear
Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,
But simply love on, love the more, perchance?
Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:*
Its ghost knows no forgetting!' Heart of mine,
Would that I dared remember! Too unwise
Were he who lost a treasure, did himself
Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue

Of gems to her his queen who trusted late
The keeper of her caskets! Can it be
That I, custodian of such relic still
As your contempt permits me to retain,
All I dare hug to breast is—'*How your glove*
Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!'
What may have followed—that is forfeit now!
I hope the proud man has grown humble.
True—
One grace of humbleness absents itself—
Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,
And not the spoken but the speechless love
Waits answer ere I rise and go my way."

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul
Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,
On, till — thinned, softened, silvered, one
might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,
Moistens the hard grey grimly comic speech.

"Ay—give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hales to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from
hook:
So artfully has new bait hidden old
Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb's beneath
The gilded minnow here! You bid break
trust,
This time, with who trusts me,—not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame,—be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband—for the lure is love,
Your love! Try other tackle, fisher-friend!
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero—one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook
seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled
tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt!
Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat? You are the Adversary!
Your fate is of your choosing: have your
choice!
Wander the world,—God has some end to
serve
Ere he suppress you! He waits: I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough
That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downwards: free I gaze and
fixed;
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move
alike
My crowned contempt. You kneel? Pro-
strate yourself!
To earth, and would the whole world saw
you there!"

Whereupon—"All right!" carelessly begins
Somebody from outside, who mounts the
stair,
And sends his voice for herald of approach:
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

"Old fellow, all's no good!
The train's your portion! Lay the blame on
me!
I'm no diplomatist, and Bismarck's self
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition—so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger! Ah!—"

Quick the voice changes to astonishment,
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and
knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling,
stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries—throat and
brow—
The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn:
Then her great eyes that turned so quick,
become
Intenser: quail at gaze, not they indeed!

v.

It is the young man shatters silence first.

"Well, my lord—for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly—this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much
My simple head-piece! Let's see how we stand
Each to the other! how we stood i' the game
Of life an hour ago,—the magpies, stile
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for truth—
My lord confessed his four-years-old affair—
How he seduced and then forsook the girl
Who married somebody and left him sad.
My pitiful experience was—I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed.
She left me, sad enough, to marry—whom?
A better man,—then possibly not you!
How does the game stand? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by?
My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed,*'
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument,
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave—
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly!
—Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase—
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came
For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these! Why else allow
The fool to gain them? So displays herself
The lady whom my heart believed—oh, laugh!
Noble and pure: whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'*I am not mine now but another's*'—thus
Being that other's! Devil's-marriage, eh?
'*My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?*'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling! Quits, I cry! Decamp content
With skin I'm peeled of: do not strip bones bare—
As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
The male there smirked, this morning, '*Come, my boy—*
Out with it! You've been crossed in love, I think:
I recognize the lover's hangdog look;
Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
For, I'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'
Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew!
Look out, Salvini! Here's your man, your match!
He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,
Last Monday—'*Here's Othello*' was our word,
'*But where's Iago?*' Where? Why, there! And now
The fellow-artist, female specimen—
Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!
He's great in art, but you—how greater still
—(If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
Apply one bit of Latin that assures
'*Art means just art's concealment*')—tower yourself!
For he stands plainly visible henceforth—
Liar and scamp: while you, in artistry
Prove so consummate—or I prove perhaps
So absolute an ass—that—either way—
You still do seem to me who worshipped you
And see you take the homage of this man
Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,
Nor trust my understanding! Still you seem
Noble and pure as when we had the talk
Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
And there's the key explains the secret: down
He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade
I' the mystery of humbug: well he may!
For how you beat him! Half an hour ago,

I held your master for my best of friends;
And now I hate him! Four years since, you seemed
My heart's one love: well, and you so remain!
What's he to you in craft?"

She looks him through.

"My friend, 'tis just that friendship have its turn—
Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
Take you as frank an answer! answers both
Begin alike so far, divergent soon
World-wide—I own superiority
Over you, over him. As him I searched,
So do you stand seen through and through by me
Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines
A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round
A spider in the hollow heart his house!
Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
When out you stepped on me, a minute since,
—This man's confederate! no, you step not thus
Obsequiously at beck and call to help
At need some second scheme, and supplement
Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
Forgive me! Only by strange chance,—most strange
In even this strange world,—you enter now,
Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged
Who never wronged you—least of all, my friend,
That day beneath the College tower and trees,
When I refused to say,—'*not friend but, love!*'
Had I been found as free as air when first
We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No—
For where was that in you which claimed return
Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
The soul in me, and lied—I know too late!
While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
My power was just my beauty—bear the word—
As I must bear, of all my qualities,
To name the poorest one that serves my soul
And simulates myself! So much in me
You loved, I know: the something that's beneath
Heard not your call,—uncalled, no answer comes!
For, since in every love, or soon or late
Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,
Take flight to find some other; so it proved—
Missing me, you were ready for this man.
I apprehend the whole relation: his—
The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
At once, true object of your tribute. Well
Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love
Divining, had assured you I no more
Stand his participant in infamy
Than you—I need no love to recognize
As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat!
Therefore accept one last friend's-word,—your friend's,
All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,
Distribute as it please you praise or blame
To me—so you but fling this mockery far—
Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!
Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart
The lesson I was sent,—if man discerned
Ever God's message,—just to teach. I judge—
To far another issue than could dream
Your cousin,—younger, fairer, as befits—
Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
I find you, save in folly, innocent.
And in my verdict lies your fate; at choice
Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you.
'*Take!*'
I bid her—for you tremble back to truth.

She turns the scale,—one touch of the pure hand
Shall so press down, emprison past relapse
Farther vibration 'twixt veracity—
That's honest solid earth—and falsehood, theft
And air, that's one illusive emptiness!
That reptile capture you? I conquered him:
You saw him cower before me. Have no fear
He shall offend you farther! Spare to spurn—
Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
Than I, anticipate the snake—bruise head
Ere he bruise heel—or, warier than the first,
Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest
Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life!

"You! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
Leave each! There's caution surely extant yet
Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
Hence quickly! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled
The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
Beside another's! Never let her know
How near came taint of your companionship!"

"Ah"—draws a long breath with a new strange look
The man she interpellates—soul a-stir
Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

"Ah—
Innocence should be crowned with ignorance?
Desirable indeed, but difficult!
As if yourself, now, had not glorified
Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her—hint, I say,—
Not the whole horror,—that were needless risk,—
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact,
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning '*Ware the wolf!*' No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity,—keeps wolf
Unhunted by flock's warder! Excellent,
Did—generous to me, mean—just to him!
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless! So,—he knows!
And yet, unharmed I breathe—perchance, repent—
Thanks to the mercifully-politic!"

"Ignorance is not innocence but sin—
Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs
Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I? Perhaps! The more contempt, the less
Hatred; and who so worthy of contempt
As you that rest assured I cooled the spot
I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me
This burnt the last and nowise least—the need
Of simulating soundness. I resolved—
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh—
To hide the truth away as in a grave
From—most of all—my husband: he nor knows
Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
My part, the devil's part,—I trust, God's part
In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
And not destroy: and what destruction like
The abolishing of faith in him, that's faith
In me as pure and true? Acquaint some child
Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
Only to pillow him is product just
Of what lies festering beneath! 'Tis God
Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man?
The miserable thing I have become
By dread acquaintance with my secret—*you*—

That thing had he become by learning *me*—
The miserable, whom his ignorance
Would wrongly call the wicked: ignorance
Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
No, he knows nothing!"

"He and I alike
Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.
What if our talk should terminate awhile?
Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
Before we part—as, by his face, I fear,
Results from your appearance on the scene.
Grant me a minute's parley with my friend
Which scarce admits of a third personage!
The room from which you made your entry first
So opportunely—still untenanted—
What if you please return there? Just a word
To my young friend first—then, a word to you,
And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home!"

"So the old truth comes back! A wholesome change,—
At last the altered eye, the rightful tone!
But even to the truth that drops disguise
And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely—I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back?
No, my lord! I enjoy the privilege
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much—the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave; and now, thank God,
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest
Of curses—neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment!"

"Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about
For something novel in expedient: take
Command,—what say you? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid—not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you! Disobey and—good!
On your own head the peril!"

"Come!" breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. "Shut up!
None of this sort of thing while I stand here
—Not to stand that! No bullying, I beg!
I also am to leave you presently
And never more set eyes upon your face—
You won't mind that much; but—I tell you frank—
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed—my friend who were!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?
Do you know,—I give credit all at once
To all those stories everybody told
And nobody but I would disbelieve:
They all seem likely now,—nay, certain, sure!
I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club: '*sauter la coupe*'—
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut' you;
While I, the booby, 'cut'—acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby; little doubt,
That fellow with the sister found you shirk
His challenge and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about! Enough:
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy: no,—that's false,—
There's no unknowing what one knows; and yet
Such is my folly that, in gratitude
For . . . well, I'm stupid; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.
Well then, for just the sake of such a wish
To cut no worse a figure than needs must

In even eyes like mine, I'd sacrifice
Body and soul! But don't think danger—pray!—
Menaces either! He do harm to us?
Let me say 'us' this one time! You'd allow
I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear
Of some cur's yelping—hand that's fortified,
Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
My lord, you know your losses and my gains.
Pay me my money at the proper time!
If cash be not forthcoming,—well, yourself
Have taught me, and tried often, I'll engage,
The proper course: I post you at the Club,
Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day,
Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind
My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,
So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew!
I wonder now if I could rummage out
—Just to match weapons—some old scorpion-scourge!
Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud
His triumph o'er the master. I—no more
Bully, since I'm forbidden: but entreat—
Wait and return—for my sake, no! but just
To save your own defender, should he chance
Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong.
And what if—since all waiting's weary work—
I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
And entry then? for—pastime proper—here's
The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
To make the laughing minutes launch away!
Each of us must contribute. I'll begin—
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
I'm confident I beat the bard,—for why?
My young friend owns me an Iago—him
Confessed, among the other qualities,
A ready rhymer. Oh, he rhymed! Here goes!
—Something to end with '*horsewhip!*' No, that rhyme
Beats me; there's '*cowslip*,' '*boltsprit*,' nothing else!
So, Tennyson take my benison,—verse for bard,
Prose suits the gambler's book best! Dared and done!"

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two,
Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
Turns half away, turns round again, at last
Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.
The door shuts fast the couple.

VI.

With a change
Of his whole manner, opens out at once
The Adversary.

"Now, my friend, for you!
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware!
Plain speech in me becomes respectable
Henceforth, because courageous; plainly, then—
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light!)
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
Yourself and friend by passing in review
So courteously but now, I vainly search
To find one record of a specimen
So perfect of the pure and simple fool
As this you furnish me. Ingratitude
I lump with folly,—all's one lot,—so—fool!
Did I seek you or you seek me? Seek? sneak
For service to, and service you would style—
And did style—godlike, scarce an hour ago!
Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
First-rate in folly: since the hand you kissed
Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
On that firm pavement which your cowardice

Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
Men, now—familiarly you read them off,
Each phyz at first sight! O you had an eye!
Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox
Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb?'
'*Ay, but I saved you—wolf defeated fox—*
Wanting to pick your bones myself!' then, wolf
Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
(—No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart.)
And how you turn advantage to account
Here's the example. Have I proved so wrong
In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged?*'
O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave
The old friend out at elbows—pooh, a thing
Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,
And you forget your generosity!
Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
My laugh to that! First quarrel—nay, first faint
Pretence at taking umbrage—'*Down with debt,*
Both interest and principal!—The Club,
Exposure and expulsion!—stamp me out!'
That's the magnanimous magnificent
Renunciation of advantage! Well,
But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?
Because your master, having made you know
Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
Expound you women, still a mystery!
My pupil pottered with a cloud on brow,
A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved:
Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world
As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I—
'*Quick rid him of that rubbish! Clear the cloud,*
And set the heart a-pulsing!'—heart, this time:
'Twas nothing but the head I doctored late
For ignorance of Man; now heart's to dose,
Palsied by over-palpitation due
To Woman-worship—so, to work at once
On first avowal of the patient's ache!
This morning you described your malady,—
How you dared love a piece of virtue—lost
To reason, as the upshot showed: for scorn
Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance;
And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
Her path—perfection, while forlorn you paced
The world that's made for beasts like you and me.
My remedy was—tell the fool the truth!
Your paragon of purity had plumped
Into these arms at their first outspread—'*fallen*
My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase—
And, in exchange for that frank confidence,
Asked for my whole life present and to come—
Marriage: a thing uncovenanted for,
Never so much as put in question. Life—
Implied by marriage—throw that trifle in
And round the bargain off, no otherwise
Than if, when we played cards, because you won
My money you should also want my head!
That, I demurred to: we but played '*for love*'—
She won my love; had she proposed for stakes
'*Marriage*,'—why, that's for whist, a wiser game.
Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
And went her way. So far the story's known,
The remedy's applied, no farther: which
Here's the sick man's first *honorarium* for—
Posting his medicine-monger at the Club!
That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee—
In gratitude for such munificence
I'm bound in common honesty to spare
No droplet of the draught: so,—pinch your nose,

Pull no wry faces !—drain it to the dregs !
I say '*She went off*'—'*went off*,' you subjoin,
'*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*
Sure to some convent: solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir !
Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself
To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
In clerical absurdity: since he,
Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick,
The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
When you've young ladies congregant,—but schools
The poor,—toils, moils and grinds the mill nor means
To stop and munch one thistle in this life
Till next life smother him with roses: just
The parson for her purpose ! Him she stroked
Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,
And on to back with saddle,—there he stood,
The serviceable beast who heard, believed
And meekly bowed him to the burden,—borne
Off in a canter to seclusion—ay,
The lady's lost ! But had a friend of mine
—While friend he was—imparted his sad case
To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.
'*Don't fear !*' had followed reassuringly—
'*The lost will in due time turn up again,*
Probably just when, weary of the world,
You think of nothing less than settling-down
To country life and golden days, beside
A dearest best and brightest virtuousest
Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
Against the naughty-and-repentant—no,
Than water-gruel against Roman punch !'
And as I prophesied, it proves ! My youth,—
Just at the happy moment when, subdued
To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
That town-life tires, that men should drop boys'-play,
That property, position have, no doubt,
Their exigency with their privilege,
And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
The double duty !—in, behold, there beams
Our long-lost lady, form and face complete !
And where's my moralizing pupil now,
Had not his master missed a train by chance?
But, by your side instead of whirled away,
How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,
Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart !
Sudden and strange the meeting—improvised?
Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed !
But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint—
Assuredly from flesh. '*'Tis you?*' '*Myself.*'
'*Changed?*' '*Changeless.*' '*Then, what's earth to me?*' '*To me*
What's heaven?' '*So,—thine!*' '*And thine!*' '*And likewise mine!*'
Had laughed '*Amen*' the devil, but for me
Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause—
Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal
At leisure and at pleasure,—lesson's price
Being, if you have skill to estimate,
—How say you?—I'm discharged my debt in full !
Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
Unless I fare like that black majesty
A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
Coasting along the Cape-side, he's becalmed
Off an uncharted bay, a novel town
Untouched at by the trader: here's a chance !
Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
Ship's cargo—being rich and having brought
A treasure ample for the purpose. See !
Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude,—
Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth
All duly braced about with bark and board,—
Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be !

At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
The casket opens out its core, and lo
—A brand-new British silver sixpence—bid
That's ample for the Bank,—thinks majesty!
You are the Captain; call my sixpence cracked
Or copper; '*what I've said is calumny; The lady's spotless!*' Then, I'll prove my words,
Or make you prove them true as truth—yourself,
Here, on the instant! I'll not mince my speech,
Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
Make love to her! No talk of marriage now—
The point-blank bare proposal! Pick no phrase—
Prevent all misconception! Soon you'll see
How different the tactics when she deals
With an instructed man, no longer boy
Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit!
Man, since you have instruction, blush no more!
Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
'Tis simply now—demand and be possessed!
Which means—you may possess—may strip the tree
Of fruit desirable to make one wise.
More I nor wish nor want: your act's your act,
My teaching is but—there's the fruit to pluck
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance
In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect
I bid a novice—pluck, suck, send sky-high
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
Than this gold apple to my Hercules.
Were you no novice but proficient—then,
Then, truly, I might prompt you—Touch and taste,
Try flavour and be tired as soon as I!
Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow,
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,
Such lore's above you!

Here's the lady back!
So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
And come to thank its last contributor?
How kind and condescending! I retire
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,
And mar my own endeavour to make friends—
You with him, him with you, and both with me!
If I succeed—permit me to inquire
Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-bye, you know."
And out he goes.

VII.

She, face, form, bearing, one
Superb composure—

"He has told you all?
Yes, he has told you all, your silence says—
What gives him, as he thinks the mastery
Over my body and my soul!—has told
That instance, even, of their servitude
He now exacts of me? A silent blush!
That's well, though better would white ignorance
Beseem your brow, undesecrate before—
Ay, when I left you! I too learn at last
—Hideously learned as I seemed so late—
What sin may swell to. Yes,—I needed learn
That, when my prophet's rod became the snake
I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up
—Incorporate whatever serpentine
Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
Beslime earth's pavement: such the power of Hell,
And so beginning, ends no otherwise
The Adversary! I was ignorant,
Blameworthy—if you will; but blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
—*You*—how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort? I revolve
Much memory, pry into the looks and words
Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,

And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
Only pure marble through my dusky past,
A dubious cranny where such poison-seed
Might harbour, nourish what should yield to-day
This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.
Do not I recognize and honour truth
In seeming?—take your truth and for return,
Give you my truth, a no less precious gift?
You loved me: I believed you. I replied
—How could I other? '*I was not my own*,'
—No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
Now were another's. My own right in me,
For well or ill, consigned away—my face
Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
At the late bargain—fit such chapman's phrase!—
As though—less hasty and more provident—
Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me
The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was true,
I spared you—as I knew you then—one more
Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
Buried away for ever. Take it now
Its power to pain is past! Four years—that day—
Those limes that make the College avenue!
I would that—friend and foe—by miracle,
I had, that moment, seen into the heart
Of either, as I now am taught to see!
I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
Nor aimed at being just sustained myself
By some man's soul—the weaker woman's-want!
So had I missed the momentary thrill
Of finding me in presence of a god,
But gained the god's own feeling when he gives
Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
'*Gods many and Lords many*,' says the Book:
You would have yielded up your soul to me
—Not to the false god who has burned its clay
In his own image. I had shed my love
Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
Not sent up a wild vapour to the sun
That drinks and then disperses. Both of us
Blameworthy,—I first meet my punishment—
And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
At last I struggle—uncontaminate:
Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast
That's all one plague-spot? Did you love me once?
Then take love's last and best return! I think,
Womanliness means only motherhood;
All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,
But, having run the circle, rests at home.
Why is your expiation yet to make?
Pull shame with your own hands from your own head
Now,—never wait the slow envelopment
Submitted to by unelastic age!
One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake
Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
Your heart retains its vital warmth—or why
That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
Break from beneath this icy premature
Captivity of wickedness—I warn
Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment here!
This May breaks all to bud—no Winter now!
Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
I am past sin now, so shall you become!
Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,
My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep
The wicked counsel,—and assent might seem;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die—not dare
Confirm your dream-resolve,—nay, find the word
That fits the deed to bear the light of day!
Say I have justly judged you! then farewell

To blushing—nay, it ends in smiles, not tears!
Why tears now? I have justly judged, thank
God!"

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks
out,
—Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

"I don't know what he wrote—how should
I? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it
seems,
He chose to somehow write—mistakenly
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much; but there's my
luck—
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought!
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you
read
Right what he set down wrong? He said—
let's think!
Ay, so!—he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see—suppose
Anyone told me—my own mother died
Before I knew her—told me—to his cost!—
Such tales about my own dead mother: why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,
Would you? No reason's wanted in the case.
So with you! In they burnt on me, his tales,
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd
around,
Make captive any visitor and scream
All sorts of stories of their keeper—he's
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat,
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same;
Sane people soon see through the gibberish!
I just made out, you somehow lived some-
where
A life of shame—I can't distinguish more—
Married or single—how, don't matter much:
Shame which himself had caused—that point
was clear,
That fact confessed—that thing to hold and
keep.
Oh, and he added some absurdity
—That you were here to make me—ha, ha,
ha!—
Still love you, still of mind to die for you,
Ha, ha—as if that needed mighty pains!
Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
—What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word
In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this—this only—if I choke, who cares?—
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever! Else what use is God?
He is God, and work miracles He can!
Then, what shall I do? Quite as clear, my
course!
They've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
I' the garden yonder: and my cousin played
A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge;
And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose
And so straight pushed my path through let
and stop
And soon was out in the open, face all
scratched,
But well behind my back the prison-bars
In sorry plight enough, I promise you!
So here: I won my way to truth through
lies—
Said, as I saw light,—if her shame be shame
I'll rescue and redeem her,—shame's no
shame?
Then, I'll avenge, protect—redeem myself
The stupidest of sinners! Here I stand!
Dear,—let me once dare call you so,—you
said
Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,
Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what
ought I?
You were revealed to me: where's gratitude,
Where's memory even, where the gain of you
Discernible in my low after-life
Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go
munch
Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you,
And in your place found—him, made him
my love,

Ay, did I,—by this token, that he taught
So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God knows
Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
To marry—yes, my cousin here! I hope
That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared—
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?
Only wait! only let me serve—deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will—perhaps the power—at least
Means that have power against the world. For time—
Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound—in marriage, say—why, still,
Still, sure, there's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him
Pass freely,—and you need not look, much less
Fling me a '*Thank you—are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap—leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there's, after all,
Worst come to worst—if still there somehow be
The shame—I said was no shame,—none, I swear!—
In that case, if my hand and what it holds,—
My name,—might be your safeguard now—at once—
Why, here's the hand—you have the heart! Of course—
No cheat, no binding you, because I'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime! Prove as you propose!
Here's the hand with the name to take or leave!
That's all—and no great piece of news, I hope!"

"Give me the hand, then!" she cries hastily.
"Quick, now! I hear his footstep!"

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops
Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

"So, you accept him?"

"Till us death do part!"

"No longer? Come, that's right and rational!
I fancied there was power in common sense,
But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well—
At last each understands the other, then?
Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time
These masquerading people doff their gear,
Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress
Her stiff-starched bib and tucker,—make-believe
That only bothers when, ball-business done,
Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise*.
Just so has each of us sage three abjured
His and her moral pet particular
Pretension to superiority,
And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke!

Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed
To live and die together—for a month,
Discretion can award no more! Depart
From whatsoe'er the calm sweet solitude
Selected—Paris not improbably—
At month's end, when the honeycomb's left wax,
—You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
Enough to find your village boys and girls
In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
To—what's the phrase?—Christmas-come-never-mas!
You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear
Ere Spring-time, that's the ring-time, lose one leaf,
And—not without regretful smack of lip
The while you wipe it free of honey-smear—
Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,
Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink—
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine—nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church! As for me,—ah me,
I abdicate—retire on my success,
Four years well occupied in teaching youth
—My son and daughter the exemplary!
Time for me to retire now, having placed
Proud on their pedestal the pair: in turn,
Let them do homage to their master! You,—
Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
Sufficiently your gratitude: you paid
The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
To purpose, did you not? I told you so!
And you, but, bless me, why so pale—so faint
At influx of good fortune? Certainly,
No matter how or why or whose the fault,
I save your life—save it, nor less nor more!
You blindly were resolved to welcome death
In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole
Of his, the prig with all the preachments! *You*
Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
And wenches, while there lay a world outside
Like Paris (which again I recommend)
In company and guidance of—first, this,
Then—all in good time—some new friend as fit—
What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
As I once figured? Each dog has his day,
And mine's at sunset: what should old dog do
But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood?
Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth
Frisk it in brilliance! But don't fear! Discreet,
I shall pretend to no more recognize
My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
When certain old acquaintances may cross
His path in Park, or sit down prim beside
His plate at dinner-table: tip nor wink
Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
Under restriction,—maybe, talked sometimes
Of douche or horsewhip to,—for why? because
The gentleman would crazily declare
His best friend was—Iago! Ay, and worse—
The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
In suicidal monomania vowed,
To save her soul, she needs must starve herself!
They're cured now, both, and I tell nobody.
Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
Can spare,—without unclasping plighted troth,—
At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do—
Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards—it gripes
The precious Album fast—and prudently!
As well obliterate the record there
On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
What if all three of us contribute each
A line to that prelusive fragment,—help
The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
Dumbfoundered at such unforeseen success?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
You begin—*place aux dames!* I'll prompt you then!
'*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!

'Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!'
Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . ."

"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar
What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece!
Authorship has the alteration-itch!
No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly read
'*Before us death do part*,' what made you mine
And made me yours—the marriage-licence here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"

And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page
With left-hand only, while the right retains
The other hand, the young man's,—dreaming-drunk
He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes wide, mouth open,—half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight,—holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world—
The lady's right-hand: he but seems to read—
Does not, for certain; yet, how understand
Unless he reads?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads
Aloud that licence—or that warrant, say.

"'*One against two—and two that urge their odds*
To uttermost—I needs must try resource!
Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
"Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled—prostrate now!"
So, with my other fool-foe: I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so!
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
He loves you; he demands your love: both know
What love means in my language. Love him then!
Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
Likewise delivering from me yourself!
For, hesitate—much more, refuse consent—
I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
Consent—you stop my mouth, the only way.'

"I did well, trusting instinct: knew your hand
Had never joined with his in fellowship
Over this pact of infamy. You known—
As he was known through every nerve of me.
Therefore I '*stopped his mouth the only way*'
But *my* way! none was left for you, my friend—
The loyal—near, the loved one! No—no—no!
Threaten? Chastise? The coward would but quail.
Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake!
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
His malice had redoubled—not on me
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire—
But on poor unsuspicious innocence;
And,—victim,—to turn executioner
Also—that feat effected, forky tongue
Had done indeed its office! Once snake's '*mouth*'
Thus '*open*'—how could mortal '*stop it*'?"

"So!"

A tiger-flash—yell, spring, and scream: halloo!
Death's out and on him, has and holds him—ugh!
But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem! Right the Horatian rule!

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass!

VIII.

The youth is somehow by the lady's side.
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

"And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread: but, dying now—
Himself would hardly become talkative,
Since talk no more means torture. Fools—what fools
These wicked men are! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,
Inured me to the consciousness of life
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply,—
But that I bore about me, for prompt use
At urgent need, the thing that '*stops the mouth*'
And stays the venom? Since such need was now
Or never,—how should use not follow need?
Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life
By virtue of the licence—warrant, say,
That blackens yet this Album—white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page!
Now, let me write the line of supplement,
As counselled by my foe there: '*each a line!*'"

And she does falteringly write to end.

"*I die now through the villain who lies dead,*
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul!"

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,
And is indeed half song though meant for speech
Muttered in time to motion—stir of heart
That unsubduably must bubble forth
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

"All's ended and all's over! Verdict found
'*Not guilty*'—prisoner forthwith set free,
Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard!
Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
At last appeased, benignant! '*This young man—*
Hem—has the young man's foibles but no fault.
He's virgin soil—a friend must cultivate.
I think no plant called 'love' grows wild—a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit!'
Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief—
She'll want to hide her face with presently!
Good-bye then! '*Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,*
Addio!' Now, was ever such mistake—
Ever such foolish ugly omen? Pshaw!
Wagner, beside! '*Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai!' That's worth fifty such!
But, mum, the grave face at the opened door!"

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
Diamond and damask,—cheeks so white erewhile
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
Chased on reflection!—pausing, taps discreet;
And then, to give herself a countenance,
Before she comes upon the pair inside,
Loud—the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line—
"'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
Open the door!"

No: let the curtain fall!

PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER,

ET CETERA.

1876.

[Pacchiarotto, born Siena, 1474, was an insignificant painter, who once obtained a little credit for pictures really painted by Pacchia. He was a reformer and conspirator as well as an inferior artist.]

PROLOGUE.

I.

O the old wall here! How I could pass
Life in a long Midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
My eyes from a wall not once away!

II.

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loth,
In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

III.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body,—the house, no eye can probe,—
Divined as, beneath a robe, the limbs?

IV.

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang perhaps:
So, the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

V.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart.
I—prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start—

VI.

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and—forth to thee!

OF PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER.

I.

QUERY: was ever a quainter
Crotchet than this of the painter
Giacomo Pacchiarotto
Who took "Reform" for his motto?

II.

He, pupil of old Fungaio,
Is always confounded (heigho!)
With Pacchia, contemporaneous
No question, but how extraneous
In the grace of soul, the power
Of hand,—undoubted dower
Of Pacchia who decked (as *we* know,
My Kirkup![1]) San Bernardino,

[1] A well-known Englishman long resident in Florence.

Turning the small dark Oratory
To Siena's Art-laboratory,
As he made its straitness roomy
And glorified its gloomy,
With Bazzi[1] and Beccafumi.[2]
(Another heigho for Bazzi:
How people miscall him Razzi!)

III.

This Painter was of opinion
Our earth should be his dominion
Whose Art could correct to pattern
What Nature had slurred—the slattern!
And since, beneath the heavens,
Things lay now at sixes and sevens,
Or, as he said, *sopra-sotto*[3]—
Thought the painter Pacchiarotto
Things wanted reforming, therefore.
"Wanted it"—ay, but wherefore?
When earth held one so ready
As he to step forth, stand steady
In the middle of God's creation
And prove to demonstration
What the dark is, what the light is,
What the wrong is, what the right is,
What the ugly, what the beautiful,
What the restive, what the dutiful,
In Mankind profuse around him?
Man, devil as now he found him,
Would presently soar up angel
At the summons of such evangel,
And owe—what would Man *not* owe
To the painter Pacchiarotto?
Ay, look to thy laurels, Giotto!

IV.

But Man, he perceived, was stubborn,
Grew regular brute, once cub born;
And it struck him as expedient—
Ere he tried to make obedient
The wolf, fox, bear and monkey,
By piping advice in one key—
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not Man-fossil—
Not fact, in short, but fancy.
By a laudable necromancy
He would conjure up ghosts—a circle
Deprived of the means to work ill
Should his music prove distasteful
And pearls to the swine go wasteful.
To be rent of swine—that *was* hard!
With fancy he ran no hazard:
Fact might knock him o'er the mazzard.[4]

V.

So, the painter Pacchiarotto
Constructed himself a grotto
In the quarter of Stalloreggi—
As authors of note allege ye.
And on each of the whitewashed sides of it
He painted—(none far and wide so fit
As he to perform in fresco)—
He painted nor cried *quiesco*
Till he peopled its every square foot
With Man—from the Beggar barefoot
To the Noble in cap and feather:
All sorts and conditions together.
The Soldier in breastplate and helmet
Stood frowningly—hail fellow well met—
By the Priest armed with bell, book and candle
Nor did he omit to handle
The Fair Sex, our brave distemperer:
Not merely King, Clown, Pope, Emperor—
He diversified too his Hades
Of all forms, pinched Labour and paid Ease,
With as mixed an assemblage of Ladies.

VI.

Which work done, dry,—he rested him,
Cleaned pallet, washed brush, divested him
Of the apron that suits *frescanti*,[5]
And, bonnet on ear stuck jaunty,
This hand upon hip well planted,
That, free to wave as it wanted,
He addressed in a choice oration
His folk of each name and nation,
Taught its duty to every station.
The Pope was declared an arrant
Impostor at once, I warrant.

[1] Italian painter of the fifteenth century.
[2] Sienese painter of the sixteenth century.
[3] Upside-down.
[4] The head.
[5] Painters in fresco.

The Emperor—truth might tax him
With ignorance of the maxim
"Shear sheep but nowise flay them!"
And the Vulgar that obey them,
The Ruled, well-matched with the Ruling,
They failed not of wholesome schooling
On their knavery and their fooling.
As for Art—where's decorum? Pooh-poohed
it is
By Poets that plague us with lewd ditties,
And Painters that pester with nudities!

VII.

Now, your rater and debater
Is baulked by a mere spectator
Who simply stares and listens
Tongue tied, while eye nor glistens
Nor brow grows hot and twitchy,
Nor mouth, for a combat itchy,
Quivers with some convincing
Reply—that sets him wincing?
Nay, rather—reply that furnishes
Your debater with just what burnishes
The crest of him, all one triumph,
As you see him rise, hear him cry "Humph!
Convinced am I? This confutes me?
Receive the rejoinder that suits me!
Confutation of vassal for prince meet—
Wherein all the powers that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mincemeat!"

VIII.

So, off from his head flies the bonnet,
His hip loses hand planted on it,
While t'other hand, frequent in gesture,
Slinks modestly back beneath vesture,
As,—hop, skip and jump,—he's along with
Those weak ones he late proved so strong
with!
Pope, Emperor, lo, he's beside them,
Friendly now, who late could not abide them,
King, Clown, Soldier, Priest, Noble, Burgess;
And his voice, that out-roared Boanerges,
How minikin-mildly it urges
In accents how gentled and gingered
Its word in defence of the injured!
"O call him not culprit, this Pontiff!
Be hard on this Kaiser ye won't if
Ye take into con-si-der-ation
What dangers attend elevation!
The Priest—who expects him to descant
On duty with more zeal and less cant?
He preaches but rubbish he's reared in.
The Soldier, grown deaf (by the mere din
Of battle) to mercy, learned tippling
And what not of vice while a stripling.
The Lawyer—his lies are conventional.
And as for the Poor Sort—why mention all
Obstructions that leave barred and bolted
Access to the brains of each dolt-head?"

IX.

He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
Precedence to males in the alphabet!
Still, disposed of Man's A, B, C, there's X,
Y, Z, want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
How much may be said in excuse of
Those vanities—males see no use of—
From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
What's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
How kind can they be to their dumb pets!
Of their charms—how are most frank, how
few venal!
While as for those charges of Juvenal—
Quæ nemo dixisset in toto
Nisi (ædepol) ore illoto—
He dismissed every charge with an "*Apage!*"

X.

Then, cocking (in Scotch phrase) his cap
a-gee,
Right hand disengaged from the doubtlet
—Like landlord, in house he had sub-let
Resuming of guardianship gestion,
To call tenants' conduct in question—
Hop, skip, jump, to inside from outside
Of chamber, he lords, ladies, louts eyed
With such transformation of visage
As fitted the censor of this age.
No longer an advocate tepid
Of frailty, but champion intrepid
Of strength, not of falsehood but verity,
He, one after one, with asperity
Stripped bare all the cant-clothed abuses,
Disposed of sophistic excuses,

Forced folly each shift to abandon,
And left vice with no leg to stand on.
So crushing the force he exerted,
That Man at his foot lay converted!

XI.

True—Man bred of paint-pot and mortar!
But why suppose folks of this sort are
More likely to hear and be tractable
Than folks all alive and, in fact, able
To testify promptly by action
Their ardour, and make satisfaction
For misdeeds *non verbis sed factis?*
"With folk all alive be my practice
Henceforward! O mortar, paint-pot O,
Farewell to ye!" cried Pacchiarotto,
"Let only occasion intérpose!"

XII.

It did so: for, pat to the purpose
Through causes I need not examine,
There fell upon Siena a famine.
In vain did the magistrates busily
Seek succour, fetch grain out of Sicily,
Nay, throw mill and bakehouse wide open—
Such misery followed as no pen
Of mine shall depict ye. Faint, fainter
Waxed hope of relief: so, our painter,
Emboldened by triumph of recency,
How could he do other with decency
Than rush in this strait to the rescue,
Play schoolmaster, point as with fescue[1]
To each and all slips in Man's spelling
The law of the land?—slips now telling
With monstrous effect on the city,
Whose magistrates moved him to pity
As, bound to read law to the letter,
They minded their hornbook no better.

XIII.

I ought to have told you, at starting,
How certain, who itched to be carting
Abuses away clean and thorough
From Siena, both province and borough,
Had formed themselves into a company
Whose swallow could bolt in a lump any
Obstruction of scruple, provoking
The nicer throat's coughing and choking:
Fit Club, by as fit a name dignified
Of "Freed Ones"—"*Bardotti*"—which signified
"Spare-Horses" that walk by the waggon
The team has to drudge for and drag on.
This notable club Pacchiarotto
Had joined long since, paid scot and lot to,
As free and accepted "Bardotto."
The Bailiwick watched with no quiet eye
The outrage thus done to society,
And noted the advent especially
Of Pacchiarotto their fresh ally.

XIV.

These Spare-Horses forthwith assembled:
Neighed words whereat citizens trembled
As oft as the chiefs, in the Square by
The Duomo, proposed a way whereby
The city were cured of disaster.
"Just substitute servant for master,
Make Poverty Wealth and Wealth Poverty,
Unloose Man from overt and covert tie,
And straight out of social confusion
True Order would spring!" Brave illusion—
Aims heavenly attained by means earthy!

XV.

Off to these at full speed rushed our worthy,—
Brain practised and tongue no less tutored,
In argument's armour accoutred,—
Sprang forth, mounted rostrum and essayed
Proposals like those to which "Yes" said
So glibly each personage painted
O' the wall-side wherewith you're acquainted.
He harangued on the faults of the Bailiwick:
"Red soon were our State-candle's paly wick,
If wealth would become but interfluous,
Fill voids up with just the superfluous;
If ignorance gave way to knowledge
—Not pedantry picked up at college
From Doctors, Professors *et cætera*—
(*They* say: '*kai ta loipa*'—like better a
Long Greek string of *kappas*, *taus*, *lambdas*,
Tacked on to the tail of each damned ass)—

[1] Straw or stick used as a pointer in teaching reading.

No knowledge we want of this quality,
But knowledge indeed—practicality
Through insight's fine universality!
If you shout '*Bailiffs, out on ye all! Fie,*
Thou Chief of our forces, Amalfi,
Who shieldest the rogue and the clotpoll!'
If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole
I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's
Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas—"
(Whoever to scan this is ill able
Forgets the town's name's a dissyllable)
"If, this done, ye did—as ye might—place
For once the right man in the right place,
If you listened to me . . ."

XVI.

At which last "If"
There flew at his throat like a mastiff
One Spare-Horse—another and another!
Such outbreak of tumult and pother,
Horse-faces a-laughing and fleering,
Horse-voices a-mocking and jeering,
Horse-hands raised to collar the caitiff
Whose impudence ventured the late "If"—
That, had not fear sent Pacchiarotto
Off tramping, as fast as could trot toe,
Away from the scene of discomfiture—
Had he stood there stock-still in a dumb fit
—sure
Am I he had paid in his person
Till his mother might fail to know her son,
Though she gazed on him never so wistful,
In the figure so tattered and tristful.
Each mouth full of curses, each fist full
Of cuffings—behold, Pacchiarotto,
The pass which thy project has got to,
Of trusting, nigh ashes still hot—tow!
(The paraphrase—which I much need—is
From Horace[1] "*per ignes incedis.*")

XVII.

Right and left did he dash helter-skelter
In agonized search of a shelter.
No purlieu so blocked and no alley
So blind as allowed him to rally
His spirits and see—nothing hampered
His steps if he trudged and not scampered
Up here and down there in a city
That's all ups and downs, more the pity
For folk who would outrun the constable.
At last he stopped short at the one stable
And sure place of refuge that's offered
Humanity. Lately was coffered
A corpse in its sepulchre, situate
By St. John's Observance. "Habituate
Thyself to the strangest of bedfellows,
And, kicked by the live, kiss the dead
fellows!"
So Misery counselled the craven.
At once he crept safely to haven
Through a hole left unbricked in the struc-
ture.
Ay, Misery, in have you tucked your
Poor client and left him conterminous
With—pah!—the thing fetid and verminous!
(I gladly would spare you the detail,
But History writes what I retail.)

XVIII.

Two days did he groan in his domicile:
"Good Saints, set me free and I promise I'll
Abjure all ambition of preaching
Change, whether to minds touched by teach-
ing
—The smooth folk of fancy, mere figments
Created by plaster and pigments,—
Or to minds that receive with such rudeness
Dissuasion from pride, greed and lewdness,
—The rough folk of fact, life's true specimens
Of mind—'*haud in posse sed esse mens*'
As it was, is, and shall be for ever
Despite of my utmost endeavour.
O live foes I thought to illumine,
Henceforth lie untroubled your gloom in!
I need my own light, every spark, as
I couch with this sole friend—a carcase!"

XIX.

Two days thus he maundered and rambled;
Then, starved back to sanity, scrambled
From out his receptacle loathsome.
"A spectre!"—declared upon oath some

[1] *Odes* II. 1, 6.

Who saw him emerge and (appalling
To mention) his garments a-crawling
With plagues far beyond the Egyptian.
He gained, in a state past description,
A convent of monks, the Observancy.

XX.

Thus far is a fact: I reserve fancy
For Fancy's more proper employment:
And now she waves wing with enjoyment,
To tell ye how preached the Superior
When somewhat our painter's exterior
Was sweetened. He needed (no mincing
The matter) much soaking and rincing,
Nay, rubbing with drugs odoriferous,
Till, rid of his garments pestiferous
And robed by the help of the Brotherhood
In odds and ends,—this gown and t'other hood,—
His empty inside first well-garnished,—
He delivered a tale round, unvarnished.

XXI.

"Ah, Youth!" ran the Abbot's admonishment,
"Thine error scarce moves my astonishment.
For—why shall I shrink from asserting?—
Myself have had hopes of converting
The foolish to wisdom, till, sober,
My life found its May grow October.
I talked and I wrote, but, one morning,
Life's Autumn bore fruit in this warning:
'*Let tongue rest, and quiet thy quill be!*
Earth is earth and not heaven, and ne'er will be.'
Man's work is to labour and leaven—
As best he may—earth here with heaven;
'Tis work for work's sake that he's needing:
Let him work on and on as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding!
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.
A Spare-Horse? Be rather a thill-horse,[1]
Or—what's the plain truth—just a mill-horse!

[1] Thill=shaft.

Earth's a mill where we grind and wear mufflers:
A whip awaits shirkers and shufflers
Who slacken their pace, sick of lugging
At what don't advance for their tugging.
Though round goes the mill, we must still post
On and on as if moving the mill-post.
So, grind away, mouth-wise and pen-wise,
Do all that we can to make men wise!
And if men prefer to be foolish,
Ourselves have proved horse-like not mulish:
Sent grist, a good sackful, to hopper,
And worked as the Master thought proper.
Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbot;
Stick thou, Son, to daub-brush and dab-pot!
But, soft! I scratch hard on the scab hot?
Though cured of thy plague, there may linger
A pimple I fray with rough finger?
So soon could my homily transmute
Thy brass into gold? Why, the man's mute!"

XXII.

"Ay, Father, I'm mute with admiring
How Nature's indulgence untiring
Still bids us turn deaf ear to Reason's
Best rhetoric—clutch at all seasons
And hold fast to what's proved untenable!
Thy maxim is—Man's not amenable
To argument: whereof by consequence—
Thine arguments reach me: a non-sequence!
Yet blush not discouraged, O Father!
I stand unconverted, the rather
That nowise I need a conversion.
No live man (I cap thy assertion)
By argument ever could take hold
Of me. 'Twas the dead thing, the clay-cold,
Which grinned '*Art thou so in a hurry*
That out of warm light thou must skurry
And join me down here in the dungeon
Because, above, one's Jack and one—John,
One's swift in the race, one—a hobbler,
One's a crowned king, and one—a capped cobbler,
Rich and poor, sage and fool, virtuous, vicious?
Why complain? Art thou so unsuspicious
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing

His part in the after-construction
—Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal,
And act, and let act, in existence!
For, as thou art clapped hence or hissed hence,
Thou hast thy promotion or otherwise.
And why must wise thou have thy brother wise
Because in rehearsal thy cue be
To shine by the side of a booby?
No polishing garnet to ruby!
All's well that ends well—through Art's magic
Some end, whether comic or tragic,
The Artist has purposed, be certain!
Explained at the fall of the curtain—
In showing thy wisdom at odds with
That folly: he tries men and gods with
No problem for weak wits to solve meant,
But one worth such Author's evolvement.
So, back nor disturb play's production
By giving thy brother instruction
To throw up his fool's-part allotted!
Lest haply thyself prove besotted
When stript, for thy pains, of that costume
Of sage, which has bred the imposthume
I prick to relieve thee of,—Vanity!'

XXIII.

"So, Father, behold me in sanity!
I'm back to the palette and mahlstick:
And as for Man—let each and all stick
To what was prescribed them at starting!
Once planted as fools—no departing
From folly one inch, *sæculorum*
In sæcula! Pass me the jorum,
And push me the platter—my stomach
Retains, through its fasting, still some ache—
And then, with your kind *Benedicite*,
Good-bye!"

XXIV.

I have told with simplicity
My tale, dropped those harsh analytics,
And tried to content you, my critics,
Who greeted my early uprising!
I knew you through all the disguising,
Droll dogs, as I jumped up, cried "Heyday!
This Monday is—what else but May-day?
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows,
Are surely the privileged fellows.
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows,"
(I threw up the window) "your pleasure?"

XXV.

Then he who directed the measure—
An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,
"We critics as sweeps out your chimbly!
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir!
Who spares coal in kitchen an't you, sir!
And neighbours complain it's no joke, sir,
—You ought to consume your own smoke, sir!"

XXVI.

Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you—
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I'm pious
However: 'twas God made you dingy
And me—with no need to be stingy
Of soap, when 'tis sixpence the packet.
So, dance away, boys, dust my jacket,
Bang drum and blow fife—ay, and rattle
Your brushes, for that's half the battle!
Don't trample the grass,—hocus-pocus
With grime my Spring snowdrop and crocus,—
And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
Who knows but you give me an inkling
How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
Of regular drum and triangle?
Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 'tis proven
I break rule as bad as Beethoven.
"That chord now—a groan or a grunt is't?
Schumann's self was no worse contrapuntist.
No ear! or if ear, so tough-gristled—
He thought that he sung while he whistled!"

XXVII.

So, this time I whistle, not sing at all,
My story, the largess I fling at all
And every the rough there whose *aubade*[1]
Did its best to amuse me,—nor *so* bad!
Take my thanks, pick up largess, and scamper
Off free, ere your mirth gets a damper!
You've Monday, your one day, your fun-day,
While mine is a year that's all Sunday.

[1] Serenade.

I've seen you, times — who knows how many?—
Dance in here, strike up, play the zany,
Make mouths at the tenant, hoot warning
You'll find him decamped next May-morning;
Then scuttle away, glad to 'scape hence
With—kicks? no, but laughter and ha'pence!
Mine's freehold, by grace of the grand Lord
Who lets out the ground here,—my landlord:
To him I pay quit-rent—devotion;
Nor hence shall I budge, I've a notion,
Nay, here shall my whistling and singing
Set all his street's echoes a-ringing
Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle* us!
Troop, all of you—man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*
First comes to her hand—things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in—
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there—
He'll think, as the pickle he curses,
I've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens: so, sauced in
Your own sauce, . . .[1]

XXVIII.

But, back to my Knight of the Pencil,
Dismissed to his fresco and stencil![2]

Whose story—begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle,—
To small enough purpose were studied
If it ends with crown cracked or nose bloodied.
Come, critics,—not shake hands, excuse me!
But—say have you grudged to amuse me
This once in the forty-and-over
Long years since you trampled my clover
And scared from my house-eaves each sparrow
I never once harmed by that arrow
Of song, *karterotaton belos*,[3]
(Which Pindar declares the true *melos*[4])
I was forging and filing and finishing,
And no whit my labours diminishing
Because, though high up in a chamber
Where none of your kidney may clamber
Your hullabaloo would approach me?
Was it "grammar" wherein you would "coach" me—
You,—pacing in even that paddock
Of language allotted you *ad hoc*,
With a clog at your fetlocks,—you—scorners
Of me free of all its four corners?
Was it "clearness of words which convey thought?"
Ay, if words never needed enswathe aught
But ignorance, impudence, envy
And malice—what word-swathe would then vie
With yours for a clearness crystalline?
But had you to put in one small line
Some thought big and bouncing—as noddle
Of goose, born to cackle and waddle
And bite at man's heel as goose-wont is,
Never felt plague its puny *os frontis*—
You'd know, as you hissed, spat and sputtered,
Clear cackle is easily uttered!

XXIX.

Lo, I've laughed out my laugh on this mirth-day!
Beside, at week's end, dawns my birth-day,

[1] No, please! For
"Who would be satirical
On a thing so very small?"
—*Printer's Devil.* [Note by R. B.]

[2] A thin plate with patterns cut out so as to be transferred to a substance placed underneath the plate.

[3] The strongest dart.

[4] Method.

That *hebdome, hieron emar*[1]—
(More things in a day than you deem are!)
—*Tei gar Apollona chrusaora*
Egeinato Leto.[2] So, gray or ray
Betide me, six days hence, I'm vexed here
By no sweep, that's certain, till next year!
"Vexed?"—roused from what else were insipid ease!
Leave snoring a-bed to Pheidippides!
We'll up and work! won't we, Euripides?

AT THE "MERMAID."

The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?
B. JONSON. (*Adapted.*)

I.

I—"Next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

II.

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.
Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
Here's my life-long work: and where
—Where's your warrant or my token
I'm the dead king's son and heir?

III.

Here's my work: does work discover—
What was rest from work—my life?
Did I live man's hater, lover?
Leave the world at peace, at strife?
Call earth ugliness or beauty?
See things there in large or small?
Use to pay its Lord my duty?
Use to own a lord at all?

IV.

Blank of such a record, truly
Here's the work I hand, this scroll,
Yours to take or leave; as duly,
Mine remains the unproffered soul.
So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

V.

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

VI.

Rarities or, as he'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own:
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone!
Whence—the comfort set a-strutting,
Whence—the outcry "Haste, behold!
Bard's breast open wide, past shutting,
Shows what brass we took for gold!"

VII.

Friends, I doubt not he'd display you
Brass—myself call orichalc,[3]—
Furnish much amusement; pray you
Therefore, be content I baulk
Him and you, and bar my portal!
Here's my work outside: opine
What's inside me mean and mortal!
Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

[1] The seventh, a holy day.
[2] On which the golden-sworded Apollo was born of Latona.
[3] Bronze.

VIII.

Which is—not to buy your laurel
As last king did, nothing loth.
Tale adorned and pointed moral
Gained him praise and pity both.
Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
Forth by scores oaths, curses flew:
Proving you were cater-cousins,
Kith and kindred, king and you!

IX.

Whereas do I ne'er so little
(Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
Where's one plague that claims respect?

X.

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did, and does, smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

XI.

What, like you, he proved—your Pilgrim—
This our world a wilderness,
Earth still grey and heaven still grim,
Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
Men all rogues and women—say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
Grown folk drop or throw away?

XII.

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.
I find earth not grey but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All's blue.

XIII.

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
Rogues and fools enough: the more
Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
Some few honest to the core.
Scan the near high, scout the far low!
"But the low come close:" what then?
Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

XIV.

Womankind—"the cat-like nature,
False and fickle, vain and weak"—
What of this sad nomenclature
Suits my tongue, if I must speak?
Does the sex invite, repulse so,
Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
So becalm but to convulse so,
Decking heads and breaking hearts?

XV.

Well may you blaspheme at fortune!
I "threw Venus"[1] (Ben, expound!)
Never did I need importune
Her, of all the Olympian round.
Blessings on my benefactress!
Cursings suit—for aught I know—
Those who twitched her by the back tress,
Tugged and thought to turn her—so!

XVI.

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
Thus I'm left with,—joy or grief
Be the issue,—I abandon
Hope or care you name me Chief!
Chief and king and Lord's anointed,
I?—who never once have wished
Death before the day appointed:
Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

XVII.

"Ah, but so I shall not enter,
Scroll in hand, the common heart—
Stopped at surface: since at centre
Song should reach *Welt-schmerz*, world-smart!"

[1] The best cast in dice (three sixes) is called Venus.

"Enter in the heart?" Its shelly
Cuirass guard mine, fore and aft!
Such song "enters in the belly
And is cast out in the draught."

XVIII.

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
"Kingship" quotha? I shall wait—
Waive the present time: some new age . . .
But let fools anticipate!
Meanwhile greet me—"friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will," my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With "Next Poet"—(Manners, Ben!)

HOUSE.

I.

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
"Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?"

II.

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
"Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

III.

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

IV.

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced:
And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped: exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!
"Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!
What a parcel of musty old books about!
He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health!

VII.

"I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
A brasier?—the pagan, he burned perfumes!
You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed:
His wife and himself had separate rooms."

VIII.

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'Tis the fall of its frontage permits you feast
On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

IX.

Outside should suffice for evidence:
And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense—
No optics like yours, at any rate!

X.

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! '*With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!'
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP.

I.

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II.

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

III.

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,
—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV.

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V.

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI.

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that's clear.

VII.

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

VIII.

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX.

Nowise! At back of all that spread
Of merchandize, woe's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
The owner couched, his ware behind,
—In cupboard suited to his mind.

X.

For why? He saw no use of life
But, while he drove a roaring trade,
To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
Yet zero in my profits made!

XI.

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII.

'Twas lodging best to live most nigh
(Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

XIII.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped!

XIV.

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare!
'*Sell and scud home*' be shop's affair!"

XV.

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

XVI.

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII.

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang
On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII.

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned;
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

XXI.

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

XXII.

But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. I.

I.

Over the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
One reconcilement.

II.

Orbed as appointed,
Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
One from the other.
All's lend-and-borrow;
Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
Angel weds devil!

III.

"Which things must—*why* be?"
Vain our endeavour!
So shall things aye be
As they were ever.
"Such things should *so* be!"
Sage our desistence!
Rough-smooth let globe be,
Mixed—man's existence!

IV.

Man—wise and foolish,
Lover and scorner,
Docile and mulish—
Keep each his corner!
Honey yet gall of it!
There's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only, I'm dying!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. II.

I.

COULD I but live again,
Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
Pass to fruition?

II.

"Soft!" I'd say, "Soul mine!
Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
Digging out deniers!
Let the dazed hawk soar,
Claim the sun's rights too!
Turf 'tis thy walk's o'er,
Foliage thy flight's to."

III.

Only a learner,
Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
I would teach no one.
I am earth's native:
No rearranging it!
I be creative,
Chopping and changing it?

IV.

March, men, my fellows!
Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
Fancy you love me:
Those who, below me,
(Distance makes great so)
Free to forego me,
Fancy you hate so!

V.

Praising, reviling,
Worst head and best head,
Past me defiling,
Never arrested,
Wanters, abounders,
March, in gay mixture,
Men, my surrounders!
I am the fixture.

VI.

So shall I fear thee,
Mightiness yonder!
Mock-sun—more near thee,
What is to wonder?
So shall I love thee,
Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
Star that now sparklest!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES.

I.

HERE'S my case. Of old I used to love him
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,—
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

II.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
Present, he would find me at his side.

III.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

IV.

"Some day" proving—no day! Here's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

V.

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts!—How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—
Call them forgery from A to Z!

VI.

"Actions? Where's your certain proof" (they bother)
"He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action—claimed by men, a multitude?"

VII.

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—
Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!
He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

VIII.

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
One thing's sure enough: 'tis neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

IX.

All my days, I'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
Lives my friend because I love him still!"

X.

Ah, but there's a menace someone utters!
"What and if your friend at home play tricks?
Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks?

XI.

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?
Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal?
Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,*
Does see now, and presently shall feel'?"

XII.

"Why, that makes your friend a monster!" say you:
"Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?" Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God?

NATURAL MAGIC.

I.

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt—I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

II.

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed!
Wide opens the entrance: where's cold now, where's gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE.

I.

FLOWER—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

II.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

BIFURCATION.

WE were two lovers; let me lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe—
"I loved him; but my reason bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the tempter's bribe
Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life's far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm-in-arm with friend.
So, truth turned falsehood: '*How I loathe a flower,*
How prize the pavement!' still caressed his ear—
The deafish friend's—through life's day, hour by hour,
As he laughed (coughing) '*Ay, it would appear!*'
But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broadway, were the best—
Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.
I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness fuse."

Inscribe on mine—"I loved her: love's track lay
O'er sand and pebble, as all travellers know.
Duty led through a smiling country, gay
With greensward where the rose and lily blow.
'*Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!*' said she;
"'*Tis duty I abide by: homely sward*
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted!' But man needs must move,
Keep moving—whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love?
No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-block
But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,
There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock,
Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried '*All's well!*
Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne'er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, whereof—since here
One must suffice a man—why, this one must!'"

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint
The simple—which holds sinner, which holds saint!

NUMPHOLEPTOS.

[Caught by a Nymph.]

STILL you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft

I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit, lies, transformed at last
To sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love's birth at the limit's happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn!—true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay—I scarce should know
From gold's self, thus suffused! For gold means love.
What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,
Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavour! As my lips now kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh and hard—
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried yet through a world which brings me back
Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there—take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love—not placid pardon now—his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unembued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,
So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon—not love—in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon coloured shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray
Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began—before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source
And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage—no stay nor stint

To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused
With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay—flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatso'er befell,
I followed, wheresoe'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage,—trode that tinct whereof the trace
On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead
Your own permission — your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surround
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams through;
Till, last . . . but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave . . .
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot
May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return
Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,
The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement! Like enough!
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with! O that ear
All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Feminity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein . . .

Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this—the crimson-quest—
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile?—which I obey.

APPEARANCES.

I.

AND so you found that poor room dull,
Dark, hardly to your taste, my dear?
Its features seemed unbeautiful:
But this I know—'twas there, not here,
You plighted troth to me, the word
Which—ask that poor room how it heard.

II.

And this rich room obtains your praise
Unqualified,—so bright, so fair,
So all whereat perfection stays?
Ay, but remember—here, not there,
The other word was spoken! Ask
This rich room how you dropped the mask!

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

I.

NO protesting, dearest!
Hardly kisses even!
Don't we both know how it ends?
How the greenest leaf turns serest,
Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven,
Lovers—friends?

II.

You would build a mansion,
I would weave a bower
—Want the heart for enterprise.
Walls admit of no expansion:
Trellis-work may haply flower
Twice the size.

III.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
New buds, old blooms after.
Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
Rooftree scarce support a rafter,
Walls lie wrecked?"

IV.

You are young, my princess!
I am hardly older:
Yet—I steal a glance behind.
Dare I tell you what convinces
Timid me that you, if bolder,
Bold—are blind?

V.

Where we plan our dwelling
Glooms a graveyard surely!
Headstone, footstone moss may drape,—
Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
But, though corpses rot obscurely,
Ghosts escape.

VI.

Ghosts! O breathing Beauty,
Give my frank word pardon!
What if I—somehow, somewhere—
Pledged my soul to endless duty
Many a time and oft? Be hard on
Love—laid there?

VII.

Nay, blame grief that's fickle,
Time that proves a traitor,
Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
Laid Love low, through flowers which later
Shroud the corpse!

VIII.

And you, my winsome lady,
Whisper with like frankness!
Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are yon—which shimmer mid the shady
Where moss and violet run to rankness—
Tombs or no?

IX.

Who taxes you with murder?
My hands are clean—or nearly!
Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
Though now—alas!

X.

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
Only Love's ghost plays truant,
And warns us have in wholesome awe
Durable mansionry; that's wherefore
I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
—Life, to law.

XI.

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempts rain and hail and thunder.
If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope,—why, boughs were agile;
If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
Wreathing—rose!

XII.

So, truce to the protesting,
So, muffled be the kisses!
For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
Ask else Penelope, Ulysses—
Old in youth!

XIII.

For why should ghosts feel angered?
Let all their interference
Be faint march-music in the air!
"Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!
Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,
Laggard pair!"

XIV.

The while you clasp me closer,
The while I press you deeper,
As safe we chuckle,—under breath,
Yet all the slyer, the jocoser,—
"So, life can boast its day, like leap-year,
Stolen from death!"

XV.

Ah me—the sudden terror!
Hence quick—avaunt, avoid me,
You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!
Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!
So, 'twas Death's self that clipped and coyed me,
Loved—and lied!

XVI.

Ay, dead loves are the potent!
Like any cloud they used you,
Mere semblance you, but substance they!
Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!
Mere flesh—their spirit interfused you!
Hence, I say!

XVII.

All theirs, none yours the glamour!
Theirs each low word that won me,
Soft look that found me Love's, and left
What else but you—the tears and clamour
That's all your very own! Undone me—
Ghost-bereft!

HERVÉ RIEL.[1]

[Mr. Browning sent the hundred guineas he received for this poem to the relief of the starving French after the siege of Paris. The story the poem records is true.]

I.

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,[2]
With the English fleet in view.

II.

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;

[1] First published (*Cornhill Magazine*) in 1871.

[2] The river which runs into the English Channel at St. Malo.

And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

III.

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,—
Shall the 'Formidable' here, with her twelve and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV.

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V.

Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.[1]

VI.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins?[2] Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this 'Formidable' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,—
—Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life,—here's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII.

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!

[1] Native of Le Croisic, a village at the mouth of the Loire.
[2] Natives of St. Malo.

Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII.

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville."

X.

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

A FORGIVENESS.

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!"
The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains
His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appal him: happy to excess,—
Work freely done should balance happiness
Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof
I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe
Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"
I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
—Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.
My fancies in the natural order ran:
"A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambuscade,—
A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,
And—back to that last fancy of the train—
"A danger risked for hope of just a word
With—which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?
Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgeling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be
Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June

Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose :
Or whether hungry for my hate — who knows?—
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment :—anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now
The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse
As well as love—you are to recollect !

"Stay !" she said. "Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that's spotless hitherto—your own !
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last !
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower's bondage : tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite !
I love him as I hate you. Kill me ! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike
Out of existence—hate and love ! Whence love?
That's safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,
At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me ! "

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—
Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient : I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—
Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such ! As for my love-romance—
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup !
Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me—a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember,—staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost :
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb ; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all !
Now, work—no word before the curtain fall !"

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant :
My "word," permissible in death's event,
Would be—truth, soul to soul ; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game
If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince
No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride

Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture—every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
—Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord; where a speech was due
There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too
Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her—
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,
Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence,
Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace, where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door
As we two stood by the saloon—now blank
And disencumbered of its guests—there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

"I half forget
The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word—if you grant
That grace—within a certain room you called
Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break
The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentining ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are,—
Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—
Always in silence,—till I reach the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of entrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand—
The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height,—'twas here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung
That last toy on the table—gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience?—own that each

Equalled advantage — sportsman's — statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face.
She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain
Why that first struck me, know—not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public,—all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that face
I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize:
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill,—
Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not
An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,
And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished sight,
Reported daily she it was—not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed
May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to the ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract
And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp
While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
—These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open—what intend
They else but water-purlings—pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,
Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank,
But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank

From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game
Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words,
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know
This shame, my three years' torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most
In men is—action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—
Prompt follows placability, regret,
Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.
Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

"Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!"

"No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied."

"And yet you loved me?"

"Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"

"Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself *I* learn—who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle, survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt
Of your all-despicable life—perturb
The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough—
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life
Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
—Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown
Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would—how rewardingly!—
Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.

No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress
Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise—
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment
Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
'*I loved my husband and I hated—who*
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!'
Here
Lies paper!"

"Would my blood for ink suffice!"

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.
Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away
In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

CENCIAJA.

[Cencigaga is a bundle of rags—a trifle. The Italian proverb may be translated thus: "Every poor creature will be pressing into the company of his betters." See the "Browning Cyclopædia," p. 97.]

Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato.
—*Italian Proverb.*

MAY I print, Shelley, how it came to pass
That when your Beatrice seemed—by lapse
Of many a long month since her sentence fell—
Assured of pardon for the parricide,—
By intercession of staunch friends, or, say,
By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt,—

Suddenly all things changed and Clement grew
"Stern," as you state, "nor to be moved nor bent,
But said these three words coldly '*She must die;*
Subjoining '*Pardon? Paolo Santa Croce*
Murdered his mother also yestereve,
And he is fled: she shall not flee at least!'
—So, to the letter, sentence was fulfilled?
Shelley, may I condense verbosity
That lies before me, into some few words
Of English, and illustrate your superb
Achievement by a rescued anecdote,
No great things, only new and true beside?
As if some mere familiar of a house
Should venture to accost the group at gaze
Before its Titian, famed the wide world through,
And supplement such pictured masterpiece
By whisper "Searching in the archives here,
I found the reason of the Lady's fate,
And how by accident it came to pass
She wears the halo and displays the palm:
Who, haply, else had never suffered—no,
Nor graced our gallery, by consequence."
Who loved the work would like the little news:
Who lauds your poem lends an ear to me
Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell' Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide
With Paolo his own brother,—he whose crime
And flight induced "those three words—She must die.
Thus I unroll you then the manuscript.

"God's justice"—(of the multiplicity
Of such communications extant still,
Recording, each, injustice done by God
In person of his Vicar-upon-earth,
Scarce one but leads off to the self-same tune)—
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Croce."

Many times
The youngster,—having been importunate
That Marchesine Costanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty,—
And meeting just as often with rebuff,—
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady—thus.

He first, to cover his iniquity,
Writes to Onofrio Santa Croce, then
Authoritative lord, acquainting him
Their mother was contamination—wrought
Like hell-fire in the beauty of their House
By dissoluteness and abandonment
Of soul and body to impure delight.
Moreover, since she suffered from disease,
Those symptoms which her death made manifest
Hydroptic, he affirmed were fruits of sin
About to bring confusion and disgrace
Upon the ancient lineage and high fame
O' the family, when published. Duty bound,
He asked his brother—what a son should do?

Which when Marchese dell' Oriolo heard
By letter, being absent at his land
Oriolo, he made answer, this, no more:
"It must behove a son,—things haply so,—
To act as honour prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers"—here advice broke off.

By which advice informed and fortified,
As he professed himself—since bound by birth
To hear God's voice in primogeniture—
Paolo, who kept his mother company
In her domain Subiaco, straightway dared
His whole enormity of enterprise
And, falling on her, stabbed the lady dead;
Whose death demonstrated her innocence,
And happened,—by the way,—since Jesus Christ
Died to save man, just sixteen hundred years.
Costanza was of aspect beautiful

Exceedingly, and seemed, although in age
Sixty about, to far surpass her peers
The coëtaneous dames, in youth and grace.

Done the misdeed, its author takes to flight,
Foiling thereby the justice of the world:
Not God's however,—God, be sure, knows well
The way to clutch a culprit. Witness here!
The present sinner, when he least expects,
Snug-cornered somewhere i' the Basilicate,
Stumbles upon his death by violence.
A man of blood assaults a man of blood
And slays him somehow. This was afterward:
Enough, he promptly met with his deserts,
And, ending thus, permits we end with him,
And push forthwith to this important point—
His matricide fell out, of all the days,
Precisely when the law-procedure closed
Respecting Count Francesco Cenci's death
Chargeable on his daughter, sons and wife.
"Thus patricide was matched with matricide,"
A poet not inelegantly rhymed:
Nay, fratricide—those Princes Massimi!—
Which so disturbed the spirit of the Pope
That all the likelihood Rome entertained
Of Beatrice's pardon vanished straight,
And she endured the piteous death.

Now see
The sequel—what effect commandment had
For strict inquiry into this last case,
When Cardinal Aldobrandini (great
His efficacy—nephew to the Pope)
Was bidden crush—ay, though his very hand
Got soil i' the act—crime spawning everywhere!
Because, when all endeavour had been used
To catch the aforesaid Paolo, all in vain—
"Make perquisition" quoth our Eminence,
"Throughout his now deserted domicile!
Ransack the palace, roof and floor, to find
If haply any scrap of writing, hid
In nook or corner, may convict — who knows?—
Brother Onofrio of intelligence
With brother Paolo, as in brotherhood
Is but too likely: crime spawns everywhere."

And, every cranny searched accordingly,
There comes to light—O lynx-eyed Cardinal!—
Onofrio's unconsidered writing-scrap,
The letter in reply to Paolo's prayer,
The word of counsel that—things proving so,
Paolo should act the proper knightly part,
And do as was incumbent on a son,
A brother—and a man of birth, be sure!

Whereat immediately the officers
Proceeded to arrest Onofrio—found
At foot-ball, child's play, unaware of harm,
Safe with his friends, the Orsini, at their seat
Monte Giordano; as he left the house
He came upon the watch in wait for him
Set by the Barigel,—was caught and caged.

News of which capture being, that same hour,
Conveyed to Rome, forthwith our Eminence
Commands Taverna, Governor and Judge,
To have the process in especial care,
Be, first to last, not only president
In person, but inquisitor as well,
Nor trust the by-work to a substitute:
Bids him not, squeamish, keep the bench, but scrub
The floor of Justice, so to speak,—go try
His best in prison with the criminal:
Promising, as reward for by-work done
Fairly on all-fours, that, success obtained
And crime avowed, or such connivency
With crime as should procure a decent death—
Himself will humbly beg — which means, procure—
The Hat and Purple from his relative
The Pope, and so repay a diligence
Which, meritorious in the Cenci-case,
Mounts plainly here to Purple and the Hat.

Whereupon did my lord the Governor
So masterfully exercise the task
Enjoined him, that he, day by day, and week
By week, and month by month, from first to last
Toiled for the prize: now, punctual at his place,
Played Judge, and now, assiduous at his post,

Inquisitor — pressed cushion and scoured plank,
Early and late. Noon's fervour and night's chill,
Nought moved whom morn would, purpling, make amends!
So that observers laughed as, many a day,
He left home, in July when day is flame,
Posted to Tordinona-prison, plunged
Into a vault where daylong night is ice,
There passed his eight hours on a stretch, content,
Examining Onofrio: all the stress
Of all examination steadily
Converging into one pin-point,—he pushed
Tentative now of head and now of heart.
As when the nuthatch taps and tries the nut
This side and that side till the kernel sound,—
So did he press the sole and single point
—What was the very meaning of the phrase
'Do as beseems an honoured cavalier'?

Which one persistent question-torture,—plied
Day by day, week by week, and month by month,
Morn, noon and night,—fatigued away a mind
Grown imbecile by darkness, solitude,
And one vivacious memory gnawing there
As when a corpse is coffined with a snake
—Fatigued Onofrio into what might seem
Admission that perchance his judgment groped
So blindly, feeling for an issue—aught
With semblance of an issue from the toils
Cast of a sudden round feet late so free,
He possibly might have envisaged, scarce
Recoiled from—even were the issue death
—Even her death whose life was death and worse!
Always provided that the charge of crime,
Each jot and tittle of the charge were true.
In such a sense, belike, he might advise
His brother to expurgate crime with . . . well,
With blood, if blood must follow on *'the course*
Taken as might beseem a cavalier.'

Whereupon process ended, and report
Was made without a minute of delay
To Clement who, because of those two crimes
O' the Massimi and Cenci flagrant late,
Must needs impatiently desire result.

Result obtained, he bade the Governor
Summon the Congregation and despatch.
Summons made, sentence passed accordingly
—Death by beheading. When his death-decree
Was intimated to Onofrio, all
Man could do—that did he to save himself.
'Twas much, the having gained for his defence
The Advocate o' the Poor, with natural help
Of many noble friendly persons fain
To disengage a man of family,
So young too, from his grim entanglement:
But Cardinal Aldobrandini ruled
There must be no diversion of the law.
Justice is justice, and the magistrate
Bears not the sword in vain. Who sins must die.

So, the Marchese had his head cut off,
With Rome to see, a concourse infinite,
In Place Saint Angelo beside the Bridge:
Where, demonstrating magnanimity
Adequate to his birth and breed,—poor boy!—
He made the people the accustomed speech,
Exhorted them to true faith, honest works,
And special good behaviour as regards
A parent of no matter what the sex,
Bidding each son take warning from himself.
Truly, it was considered in the boy
Stark staring lunacy, no less, to snap
So plain a bait, be hooked and hauled ashore
By such an angler as the Cardinal!
Why make confession of his privity
To Paolo's enterprise? Mere sealing lips—
Or, better, saying "When I counselled him
'To do as might beseem a cavalier,'
What could I mean but *'Hide our parent's shame*
As Christian ought, by aid of Holy Church!
Bury it in a convent—ay, beneath
Enough dotation to prevent its ghost
From troubling earth!'" Mere saying thus,
—'tis plain,

Not only were his life the recompense,
But he had manifestly proved himself
True Christian, and in lieu of punishment
Got praise of all men. So the populace.

Anyhow, when the Pope made promise good
(That of Aldobrandini, near and dear)
And gave Taverna, who had toiled so much,
A Cardinal's equipment, some such word
As this from mouth to ear went saucily:
"Taverna's cap is dyed in what he drew
From Santa Croce's veins!" So joked the world.

I add: Onofrio left one child behind,
A daughter named Valeria, dowered with grace
Abundantly of soul and body, doomed
To life the shorter for her father's fate.
By death of her, the Marquisate returned
To that Orsini House from whence it came:
Oriolo having passed as donative
To Santa Croce from their ancestors.

And no word more? By all means! Would you know
The authoritative answer, when folk urged
"What made Aldobrandini, hound-like staunch,
Hunt out of life a harmless simpleton?"
The answer was—"Hatred implacable,
By reason they were rivals in their love."
The Cardinal's desire was to a dame
Whose favour was Onofrio's. Pricked with pride,
The simpleton must ostentatiously
Display a ring, the Cardinal's love-gift,
Given to Onofrio as the lady's gage;
Which ring on finger, as he put forth hand
To draw a tapestry, the Cardinal
Saw and knew, gift and owner, old and young;
Whereon a fury entered him—the fire
He quenched with what could quench fire only—blood.
Nay, more: "there want not who affirm to boot,
The unwise boy, a certain festal eve,
Feigned ignorance of who the wight might be
That pressed too closely on him with a crowd.
He struck the Cardinal a blow: and then,
To put a face upon the incident,
Dared next day, smug as ever, go pay court
I' the Cardinal's antechamber. Mark and mend,
Ye youth, by this example how may greed
Vainglorious operate in worldly souls!"

So ends the chronicler, beginning with
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never till it reach delinquency."
Ay, or how otherwise had come to pass
That Victor rules, this present year, in Rome?

FILIPPO BALDINUCCI ON THE PRIVILEGE OF BURIAL.

A REMINISCENCE OF A.D. 1676.

[Baldinucci, who was born at Florence in 1624, is the author of a History of Italian Art, in the course of which, under the name of the painter Buti, he records the events which form the subject-matter of this poem.]

I.

"No, boy, we must not"—so began
My Uncle (he's with God long since)
A-petting me, the good old man!
"We must not"—and he seemed to wince,
And lost that laugh whereto had grown
His chuckle at my piece of news,
How cleverly I aimed my stone—
"I fear we must not pelt the Jews!

II.

"When I was young indeed,—ah, faith
Was young and strong in Florence too!
We Christians never dreamed of scathe
Because we cursed or kicked the crew.
But now—well, well! The olive-crops
Weighed double then, and Arno's pranks
Would always spare religious shops
Whenever he o'erflowed his banks!

III.

"I'll tell you"—and his eye regained
Its twinkle—"tell you something choice!
Something may help you keep unstained
Your honest zeal to stop the voice
Of unbelief with stone-throw—spite
Of laws, which modern fools enact,
That we must suffer Jews in sight
Go wholly unmolested! Fact!

IV.

"There was, then, in my youth, and yet
Is, by our San Frediano, just
Below the Blessed Olivet,
A wayside ground wherein they thrust
Their dead,—these Jews,—the more our shame!
Except that, so they will but die,
Christians perchance incur no blame
In giving hogs a hoist to stye.

V.

"There, anyhow, Jews stow away
Their dead; and,—such their insolence,—
Slink at odd times to sing and pray
As Christians do—all make-pretence!—
Which wickedness they perpetrate
Because they think no Christians see.
They reckoned here, at any rate,
Without their host: ha, ha, he, he!

VI.

"For, what should join their plot of ground
But a good Farmer's Christian field?
The Jews had hedged their corner round
With bramble-bush to keep concealed
Their doings: for the public road
Ran betwixt this their ground and that
The Farmer's, where he ploughed and sowed,
Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.

VII.

"So, properly to guard his store
And gall the unbelievers too,
He builds a shrine and, what is more,
Procures a painter whom I knew,
One Buti (he's with God) to paint
A holy picture there—no less
Than Virgin Mary free from taint
Borne to the sky by angels: yes!

VIII.

"Which shrine he fixed,—who says him nay?—
A-facing with its picture-side
Not, as you'd think, the public way,
But just where sought these hounds to hide
Their carrion from that very truth
Of Mary's triumph: not a hound
Could act his mummeries uncouth
But Mary shamed the pack all round!

IX.

"Now, if it was amusing, judge!
—To see the company arrive,
Each Jew intent to end his trudge
And take his pleasure (though alive)
With all his Jewish kith and kin
Below ground, have his venom out,
Sharpen his wits for next day's sin,
Curse Christians, and so home, no doubt!

X.

"Whereas, each phyz upturned beholds
Mary, I warrant, soaring brave!
And in a trice, beneath the folds
Of filthy garb which gowns each knave,
Down drops it—there to hide grimace,
Contortion of the mouth and nose
At finding Mary in the place
They'd keep for Pilate, I suppose!

XI.

"At last, they will not brook—not they!—
Longer such outrage on their tribe:
So, in some hole and corner, lay
Their heads together—how to bribe
The meritorious Farmer's self
To straight undo his work, restore
Their chance to meet and muse on pelf—
Pretending sorrow, as before!

XII.

"Forthwith, a posse, if you please,
Of Rabbi This and Rabbi That
Almost go down upon their knees
To get him lay the picture flat.
The spokesman, eighty years of age,
Grey as a badger, with a goat's
Not only beard but bleat, 'gins wage
War with our Mary. Thus he dotes :—

XIII.

"'*Friends, grant a grace! How Hebrews toil*
Through life in Florence—why relate
To those who lay the burden, spoil
Our paths of peace? We hear our fate.
But when with life the long toil ends,
Why must you—the expression craves
Pardon, but truth compels me, friends!—
Why must you plague us in our graves?

XIV.

"'*Thoughtlessly plague, I would believe!*
For how can you—the lords of ease
By nurture, birthright—e'en conceive
Our luxury to lie with trees
And turf,—the cricket and the bird
Left for our last companionship:
No harsh deed, no unkindly word,
No frowning brow nor scornful lip!

XV.

"'*Death's luxury, we now rehearse*
While, living, through your streets we fare
And take your hatred: nothing worse
Have we, once dead and safe, to bear!
So we refresh our souls, fulfil
Our works, our daily tasks; and thus
Gather you grain—earth's harvest—still
The wheat for you, the straw for us.

XVI.

"'' What flouting in a face, what harm,
In just a lady borne from bier
By boys' heads, wings for leg and arm?'
You question. Friends, the harm is here—
That just when our last sigh is heaved,
And we would fain thank God and you
For labour done and peace achieved,
Back comes the Past in full review!

XVII.

"'*At sight of just that simple flag,*
Starts the foe-feeling serpent-like
From slumber. Leave it lulled, nor drag—
Though fangless—forth, what needs must strike
When stricken sore, though stroke be vain
Against the mailed oppressor! Give
Play to our fancy that we gain
Life's rights when once we cease to live!

XVIII.

"'*Thus much to courtesy, to kind,*
To conscience! Now to Florence folk!
There's core beneath this apple-rind,
Beneath this white-of-egg there's yolk!
Beneath this prayer to courtesy,
Kind, conscience—there's a sum to pouch!
How many ducats down will buy
Our shame's removal, sirs? Avouch!

XIX.

"'*Removal, not destruction, sirs!*
Just turn your picture! Let it front
The public path! Or memory errs,
Or that same public path is wont
To witness many a chance befall
Of lust, theft, bloodshed—sins enough,
Wherein our Hebrew part is small.
Convert yourselves!'—he cut up rough.

XX.

"Look you, how soon a service paid
Religion yields the servant fruit!
A prompt reply our Farmer made
So following: '*Sirs, to grant your suit*
Involves much danger! How? Transpose
Our Lady? Stop the chastisement,
All for your good, herself bestows?
What wonder if I grudge consent?

XXI.

"'—*Yet grant it: since, what cash I take*
Is so much saved from wicked use.
We know you! And, for Mary's sake,
A hundred ducats shall induce
Concession to your prayer. One day
Suffices: Master Buti's brush
Turns Mary round the other way,
And deluges your side with slush.

XXII.

"'*Down with the ducats therefore!*' Dump,
Dump, dump it falls, each counted piece,
Hard gold. Then out of door they stump,
These dogs, each brisk as with new lease
Of life, I warrant,—glad he'll die
Henceforward just as he may choose,
Be buried and in clover lie!
Well said Esaias—'*stiff-necked Jews!*'

XXIII.

"Off posts without a minute's loss
Our Farmer, once the cash in poke
And summons Buti—ere its gloss
Have time to fade from off the joke—
To chop and change his work, undo
The done side, make the side, now blank,
Recipient of our Lady—who,
Displaced thus, had these dogs to thank!

XXIV.

"Now, boy, you're hardly to instruct
In technicalities of Art!
My nephew's childhood sure has sucked
Along with mother's-milk some part
Of painter's-practice—learned, at least,
How expeditiously is plied
A work in fresco—never ceased
When once begun—a day, each side.

XXV.

"So, Buti—(he's with God)—begins:
First covers up the shrine all round
With hoarding; then, as like as twins,
Paints, t'other side the burial-ground,
New Mary, every point the same;
Next, sluices over, as agreed,
The old; and last—but, spoil the game
By telling you? Not I, indeed!

XXVI.

"Well, ere the week was half at end,
Out came the object of this zeal,
This fine alacrity to spend
Hard money for mere dead men's weal!
How think you? That old spokesman Jew
Was High Priest, and he had a wife
As old, and she was dying too,
And wished to end in peace her life!

XXVII.

"And he must humour dying whims,
And soothe her with the idle hope
They'd say their prayers and sing their hymns
As if her husband were the Pope!
And she did die—believing just
This privilege was purchased! Dead
In comfort through her foolish trust!
'*Stiff-necked ones*,' well Esaias said!

XXVIII.

"So, Sabbath morning, out of gate
And on to way, what sees our arch
Good Farmer? Why, they hoist their freight—
The corpse—on shoulder, and so, march!
'*Now for it, Buti!*' In the nick
Of time 'tis pully-hauly, hence
With hoarding! O'er the wayside quick
There's Mary plain in evidence!

XXIX.

"And here's the convoy halting: right!
O they are bent on howling psalms
And growling prayers, when opposite!
And yet they glance, for all their qualms,
Approve that promptitude of his,
The Farmer's—duly at his post
To take due thanks from every phyz,
Sour smirk—nay, surly smile almost!

XXX.

"Then earthward drops each brow again;
The solemn task's resumed; they reach
Their holy field—the unholy train:
Enter its precinct, all and each,
Wrapt somehow in their godless rites;
Till, rites at end, up-waking, lo
They lift their faces! What delights
The mourners as they turn to go?

XXXI.

"Ha, ha, he, he! On just the side
They drew their purse-strings to make quit
Of Mary,—Christ the Crucified
Fronted them now—these biters bit!
Never was such a hiss and snort,
Such screwing nose and shooting lip!
Their purchase—honey in report—
Proved gall and verjuice at first sip!

XXXII.

"Out they break, on they bustle, where,
A-top of wall, the Farmer waits
With Buti: never fun so rare!
The Farmer has the best: he rates
The rascal, as the old High Priest
Takes on himself to sermonize—
Nay, sneer '*We Jews supposed, at least,*
Theft was a crime in Christian eyes!'

XXXIII.

"'*Theft?*' cries the Farmer. '*Eat your words!*
Show me what constitutes a breach
Of faith in aught was said or heard!
I promised you in plainest speech
I'd take the thing you count disgrace
And put it here—and here 'tis put!
Did you suppose I'd leave the place
Blank, therefore, just your rage to glut?

XXXIV.

"'*I guess you dared not stipulate*
For such a damned impertinence!
So, quick, my greybeard, out of gate
And in at Ghetto! Haste you hence!
As long as I have house and land,
To spite you irreligious chaps
Here shall the Crucifixion stand—
Unless you down with cash, perhaps!'

XXXV.

"So snickered he and Buti both.
The Jews said nothing, interchanged
A glance or two, renewed their oath
To keep ears stopped and hearts estranged
From grace, for all our Church can do;
Then off they scuttle: sullen jog
Homewards, against our Church to brew
Fresh mischief in their synagogue.

XXXVI.

"But next day—see what happened, boy!
See why I bid you have a care
How you pelt Jews! The knaves employ
Such methods of revenge, forbear
No outrage on our faith, when free
To wreak their malice! Here they took
So base a method—plague o' me
If I record it in my Book!

XXXVII.

"For, next day, while the Farmer sat
Laughing with Buti, in his shop,
At their successful joke,—rat-tat,—
Door opens, and they're like to drop
Down to the floor as in there stalks
A six-feet-high herculean-built
Young he-Jew with a beard that baulks
Description. '*Help ere blood be spilt!*'

XXXVIII.

—"Screamed Buti: for he recognized
Whom but the son, no less no more,
Of that High Priest his work surprised
So pleasantly the day before!
Son of the mother, then, whereof
The bier he lent a shoulder to,
And made the moans about, dared scoff
At sober Christian grief—the Jew!

XXXIX.

"'*Sirs, I salute you! Never rise!*
No apprehension!' (Buti, white
And trembling like a tub of size,
Had tried to smuggle out of sight
The picture's self—the thing in oils,
You know, from which a fresco's dashed
Which courage speeds while caution spoils)
'*Stay and be praised, sir, unabashed!*

XL.

"'*Praised,—ay, and paid too: for I come*
To buy that very work of yours.
My poor abode, which boasts—well, some
Few specimens of Art, secures
Haply, a masterpiece indeed
If I should find my humble means
Suffice the outlay. So, proceed!
Propose—ere prudence intervenes!'

XLI.

"On Buti, cowering like a child,
These words descended from aloft,
In tone so ominously mild,
With smile terrifically soft
To that degree—could Buti dare
(Poor fellow) use his brains, think twice?
He asked, thus taken unaware,
No more than just the proper price!

XLII.

"'*Done!*' cries the monster. '*I disburse*
Forthwith your moderate demand.
Count on my custom—if no worse
Your future work be, understand,
Than this I carry off! No aid!
My arm, sir, lacks nor bone nor thews:
The burden's easy, and we're made,
Easy or hard, to bear—we Jews!'

XLIII.

"Crossing himself at such escape,
Buti by turns the money eyes
And, timidly, the stalwart shape
Now moving doorwards; but, more wise,
The Farmer,—who, though dumb, this while
Had watched advantage,—straight conceived
A reason for that tone and smile
So mild and soft! The Jew—believed!

XLIV.

"Mary in triumph borne to deck
A Hebrew household! Pictured where
No one was used to bend the neck
In praise or bow the knee in prayer!
Borne to that domicile by whom?
The son of the High Priest! Through what?
An insult done his mother's tomb!
Saul changed to Paul—the case came pat!

XLV.

"'*Stay, dog Jew . . . gentle sir, that is!*
Resolve me! Can it be, she crowned,—
Mary, by miracle,—Oh bliss!—
My present to your burial ground?
Certain, a ray of light has burst
Your veil of darkness! Had you else,
Only for Mary's sake, unpursed
So much hard money? Tell—oh, tell's!'

XLVI.

"Round—like a serpent that we took
For worm and trod on—turns his bulk
About the Jew. First dreadful look
Sends Buti in a trice to skulk
Out of sight somewhere, safe—alack!
But our good Farmer faith made bold:
And firm (with Florence at his back)
He stood, while gruff the gutturals rolled—

XLVII.

"'*Ay, sir, a miracle was worked,*
By quite another power, I trow,
Than ever yet in canvas lurked,
Or you would scarcely face me now!
A certain impulse did suggest
A certain grasp with this right-hand,
Which probably had put to rest
Our quarrel,—thus your throat once spanned!

XLVIII.

"'But I remembered me, subdued
That impulse, and you face me still!
And soon a philosophic mood
Succeeding (hear it, if you will!)
Has altogether changed my views
Concerning Art. Blind prejudice!
Well may you Christians tax us Jews
With scrupulosity too nice!

XLIX.

"'For, don't I see,—let's issue join!—
Whenever I'm allowed pollute
(I—and my little bag of coin)
Some Christian palace of repute,—
Don't I see stuck up everywhere
Abundant proof that cultured taste
Has Beauty for its only care,
And upon Truth no thought to waste?

L.

"'Jew, since it must be, take in pledge
Of payment '—*so a Cardinal*
Has sighed to me as if a wedge
Entered his heart—' this best of all
My treasures!' *Leda, Ganymede*
Or Antiope: swan, eagle, ape,
(Or what's the beast of what's the breed)
And Jupiter in every shape!

LI.

"'Whereat if I presume to ask
'But, Eminence, though Titian's whisk
Of brush have well performed its task,
How comes it these false godships frisk
In presence of—what yonder frame
Pretends to image? Surely, odd
It seems, you let confront The Name
Each beast the heathen called his god!'

LII.

"'Benignant smiles me pity straight
The Cardinal. "'Tis Truth, we prize!
Art's the sole question in debate!
These subjects are so many lies.
We treat them with a proper scorn
When we turn lies—called gods forsooth—
To lies' fit use, now Christ is born.
Drawing and colouring are Truth.

LIII.

"'Think you I honour lies so much
As scruple to parade the charms
Of Leda—Titian, every touch—
Because the thing within her arms
Means Jupiter who had the praise
And prayer of a benighted world?
He would have mine too, if, in days
Of light, I kept the canvas furled!'

LIV.

"'So ending, with some easy gibe.
What power has logic! I, at once,
Acknowledged error in our tribe
So squeamish that, when friends ensconce
A pretty picture in its niche
To do us honour, deck our graves,
We fret and fume and have an itch
To strangle folk—ungrateful knaves!

LV.

"'No, sir! Be sure that—what's its style,
Your picture?—shall possess ungrudged
A place among my rank and file
Of Ledas and what not—be judged
Just as a picture! and (because
I fear me much I scarce have bought
A Titian) Master Buti's flaws
Found there, will have the laugh flaws ought!'

LVI.

"So, with a scowl, it darkens door—
This bulk—no longer! Buti makes
Prompt glad re-entry; there's a score
Of oaths, as the good Farmer wakes
From what must needs have been a trance,
Or he had struck (he swears) to ground
The bold bad mouth that dared advance
Such doctrine the reverse of sound!

LVII.

"Was magic here? Most like! For, since,
Somehow our city's faith grows still
More and more lukewarm, and our Prince
Or loses heart or wants the will
To check increase of cold. 'Tis '*Live*
And let live! Languidly repress
The Dissident! In short,—contrive
Christians must bear with Jews: no less!'

LVIII.

"The end seems, any Israelite
Wants any picture,—pishes, poohs,
Purchases, hangs it full in sight
In any chamber he may choose!
In Christ's crown, one more thorn we rue!
In Mary's bosom, one more sword!
No, boy, you must not pelt a Jew!
O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord?"

EPILOGUE.

μεστοὶ . . .
οἱ δ' ἀμφορῆς οἴνου μέλανος ἀνθοσμίου.

I.

"The poets pour us wine—"
Said the dearest poet[1] I ever knew,
Dearest and greatest and best to me.
You clamour athirst for poetry—
We pour. "But when shall a vintage be"—
You cry—"strong grape, squeezed gold from screw,
Yet sweet juice, flavoured flowery-fine?
That were indeed the wine!"

II.

One pours your cup—stark strength,
Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp
Strained, turbid still, from the viscous[2] blood
Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!
For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;
Despatch it, then, in a single gulp!"
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
The liquor: stuff for strength.

III.

One pours your cup—sheer sweet,
The fragrant fumes of a year condensed:
Suspicion of all that's ripe or rathe,
From the bud on branch to the grass in swathe.[3]
"We suck mere milk of the seasons," saith
A curl of each nostril—"dew, dispensed
Nowise for nerving man to feat:
Boys sip such honeyed sweet!"

IV.

And thus who wants wine strong,
Waves each sweet smell of the year away;
Who likes to swoon as the sweets suffuse
His brain with a mixture of beams and dews
Turned syrupy drink—rough strength eschews:
"What though in our veins your wine-stock stay?
The lack of the bloom does our palate wrong.
Give us wine sweet, not strong!"

V.

Yet wine is—some affirm—
Prime wine is found in the world somewhere,
Of potable strength with sweet to match.
You double your heart its dose, yet catch—
As the draught descends—a violet-smatch,
Softness—however it came there,
Through drops expressed by the fire and worm:
Strong sweet wine—some affirm.

VI.

Body and bouquet both?
'Tis easy to ticket a bottle so;
But what was the case in the cask, my friends?
Cask? Nay, the vat—where the maker mends
His strong with his sweet (you suppose) and blends
His rough with his smooth, till none can know
How it comes you may tipple, nothing loth,
Body and bouquet both.

[1] His wife. See Mrs. Browning's "Wine of Cyprus."

[2] Sticky.

[3] The line or ridge of grass thrown together by the scythe.

VII.

"You" being just—the world.
No poets—who turn, themselves, the winch
Of the press; no critics—I'll even say,
(Being flustered and easy of faith to-day)
Who for love of the work have learned the way
Till themselves produce home-made, at a pinch:
No! You are the world, and wine ne'er purled
Except to please the world!

VIII.

"For, oh the common heart!
And, ah the irremissible sin
Of poets who please themselves, not us!
Strong wine yet sweet wine pouring thus,
How please still—Pindar and Æschylus!—
Drink—dipt into by the bearded chin
Alike and the bloomy lip—no part
Denied the common heart!

IX.

"And might we get such grace,
And did you moderns but stock our vault
With the true half-brandy half-attar-gul,[1]
How would seniors indulge at a hearty pull
While juniors tossed off their thimbleful!
Our Shakespeare and Milton escaped your fault,
So, they reign supreme o'er the weaker race
That wants the ancient grace!"

X.

If I paid myself with words
(As the French say well) I were dupe indeed!
I were found in belief that you quaffed and bowsed
At your Shakespeare the whole day long, caroused
In your Milton pottle-deep nor drowsed
A moment of night—toped on, took heed
Of nothing like modern cream-and-curds.
Pay me with deeds, not words!

[1] Essence of roses.

XI.

For—see your cellarage!
There are forty barrels with Shakespeare's brand.
Some five or six are abroach: the rest
Stand spigoted, fauceted. Try and test
What yourselves call best of the very best!
How comes it that still untouched they stand?
Why don't you try tap, advance a stage
With the rest in cellarage?

XII.

For—see your cellarage!
There are four big butts of Milton's brew.
How comes it you make old drips and drops
Do duty, and there devotion stops?
Leave such an abyss of malt and hops
Embellied in butts which bungs still glue?
You hate your bard! A fig for your rage!
Free him from cellarage!

XIII.

'Tis said I brew stiff drink,
But the deuce a flavour of grape is there.
Hardly a May-go-down, 'tis just
A sort of a gruff Go-down-it-must—
No Merry-go-down, no gracious gust
Commingles the racy with Springtide's rare!
"What wonder," say you "that we cough, and blink
At Autumn's heady drink?"

XIV.

Is it a fancy, friends?
Mighty and mellow are never mixed,
Though mighty and mellow be born at once.
Sweet for the future,—strong for the nonce!
Stuff you should stow away, ensconce
In the deep and dark, to be found fast-fixed
At the century's close: such time strength spends
A-sweetening for my friends!

XV.

And then—why, what you quaff
With a smack of lip and a cluck of tongue,
Is leakage and leavings—just what haps
From the tun some learned taster taps
With a promise "Prepare your watery chaps!
Here's properest wine for old and young!
Dispute its perfection—you make us laugh!
Have faith, give thanks, but—quaff!"

XVI.

Leakage, I say, or—worse—
Leavings suffice pot-valiant souls.
Somebody, brimful, long ago,
Frothed flagon he drained to the dregs; and lo,
Down whisker and beard what an overflow!
Lick spilth that has trickled from classic jowls,
Sup the single scene, sip the only verse—
Old wine, not new and worse!

XVII.

I grant you: worse by much!
Renounce that new where you never gained
One glow at heart, one gleam at head,
And stick to the warrant of age instead!
No dwarf's-lap! Fatten, by giants fed!
You fatten, with oceans of drink undrained?
You feed—who would choke did a cobweb smutch
The Age you love so much?

XVIII.

A mine's beneath a moor:
Acres of moor roof fathoms of mine
Which diamonds dot where you please to dig;
Yet who plies spade for the bright and big?
Your product is—truffles, you hunt with a pig!
Since bright-and-big, when a man would dine,
Suits badly: and therefore the Koh-i-noor
May sleep in mine 'neath moor!

XIX.

Wine, pulse in might from me!
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began—
God's gift to gladden the heart of man;
But spirit's at proof, I promise that!
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage—mine for me.

XX.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who set it—his praise be my reward!
Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's,
Let them "lay, pray, bray"—the addle-pates!
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!

XXI.

But someone says "Good Sir!"
('Tis a worthy versed in what concerns
The making such labour turn out well)
"You don't suppose that the nosegay-smell
Needs always come from the grape? Each bell
At your foot, each bud that your culture spurns,
The very cowslip would act like myrrh
On the stiffest brew—good Sir!

XXII.

"Cowslips, abundant birth
O'er meadow and hillside, vineyard too,
—Like a schoolboy's scrawlings in and out
Distasteful lesson-book—all about
Greece and Rome, victory and rout—
Love-verses instead of such vain ado!
So, fancies frolic it o'er the earth
Where thoughts have rightlier birth.

XXIII.

"Nay, thoughtlings they themselves:
Loves, hates—in little and less and least!
Thoughts? '*What is a man beside a mount!*
Loves? '*Absent—poor lovers the minutes count!*'
Hates? '*Fie—Pope's letters to Martha Blount!*'
These furnish a wine for a children's-feast:
Insipid to man, they suit the elves
Like thoughts, loves, hates themselves."

XXIV.

And, friends, beyond dispute
I too have the cowslips dewy and dear.
Punctual as Springtide forth peep they:
I leave them to make my meadow gay.
But I ought to pluck and impound them, eh?
Not let them alone, but deftly shear
And shred and reduce to—what may suit
Children, beyond dispute?

XXV.

And, here's May-month, all bloom,
All bounty: what if I sacrifice?
If I out with shears and shear, nor stop
Shearing till prostrate, lo, the crop?
And will you prefer it to ginger-pop
When I've made you wine of the memories
Which leave as bare as a churchyard tomb
My meadow, late all bloom?

XXVI.

Nay, what ingratitude
Should I hesitate to amuse the wits
That have pulled so long at my flask, nor grudged
The headache that paid their pains, nor budged
From bunghole before they sighed and judged
"Too rough for our taste, to-day, befits
The racy and right when the years conclude!"
Out on ingratitude!

XXVII.

Grateful or ingrate—none,
No cowslip of all my fairy crew
Shall help to concoct what makes you wink
And goes to your head till you think you think!
I like them alive: the printer's ink
Would sensibly tell on the perfume too.
I may use up my nettles, ere I've done;
But of cowslips—friends get none!

XXVIII.

Don't nettles make a broth
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.
My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste
On a tongue that's fur and a palate—paste!
A magnum for friends who are sound!
The sick—
I'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,
Henceforward with nettle-broth!

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

1877.

MAY I be permitted to chat a little, by way of recreation, at the end of a somewhat toilsome and perhaps fruitless adventure?

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear: while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments,—anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, "to gape for Æschylus and get Theognis." I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—πόνος, or μέγας, or τέλος, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines: for though such substitution may be in itself perfectly justifiable, yet this exercise of ingenuity ought to be within the competence of the unaided English reader if he likes to show himself ingenious. Learning Greek teaches Greek, and nothing else: certainly not common sense, if that have failed to precede the teaching. Further,—if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas, I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus, ξυμβαλεῖν οὐ ῥᾴδιος, "not easy to understand," in the opinion of his stoutest advocate among the ancients; while, I suppose, even modern scholarship sympathizes with that early declaration of the redoubtable Salmasius, when, looking about for an example of the truly obscure for the benefit of those who found obscurity in the sacred books, he protested that this particular play leaves them all behind in this respect, with their "Hebraisms, Syriasms, Hellenisms, and the whole of such bag and baggage."[1] For, over and above the purposed ambiguity of the Chorus, the text is sadly corrupt, probably interpolated, and certainly mutilated; and no unlearned person enjoys the scholar's privilege of trying his fancy upon each obstacle whenever he comes to a stoppage, and effectually clearing the way by suppressing what seems to lie in it.

All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were. Should anybody, without need, honour my translation by a comparison with the original, I beg him to observe that, following no editor exclusively, I keep to the earlier readings so long as sense can be made out of them, but disregard, I hope, little of importance in recent criticism so far as I have fallen in with it. Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful,—though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems,—will not only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—"the action of the piece"—but may help to illustrate his assurance that "the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style: their expression is so excellent because it is so

[1] "Quis Æschylum possit affirmare Græce nunc scienti magis patere explicabilem quam Evangelia aut Epistolas Apostolicas? Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis Hebraismis et Syriasmis et tota Hellenisticæ supellectili vel farragine."—SALMASIUS *de Hellenistica*, Epist. Dedic.

admirably kept in its right degree of prominence, because it is so simple and so well subordinated, because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys . . . not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in, stroke on stroke!"[1] So may all happen!

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. Leigh Hunt, I remember, was accustomed to speak of his gratitude, when ignorant of Greek, to those writers (like Goldsmith) who had obliged him by using English characters, so that he might relish, for instance, the smooth quality of such a phrase as "hapalunetai galené;" he said also that Shelley was indignant at "Firenze" having displaced the Dantesque "Fiorenza," and would contemptuously English the intruder "Firence." I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough: but there has been till lately much astonishment at *os* and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *υ* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped "Eyripides." But there existed a sturdy Briton who, Ben Jonson informs us, wrote "The Life of the Emperor Anthony Pie"—whom we now acquiesce in as Antoninus Pius: for "with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin." Yet there is, on all sides, much profession of respect for what Keats called "vowelled Greek"—"consonanted," one would expect; and, in a criticism upon a late admirable translation of something of my own, it was deplored that, in a certain verse corresponding in measure to the fourteenth of the sixth Pythian Ode, "neither Professor Jebb in his Greek, nor Mr. Browning in his English, could emulate that matchlessly musical *γόνον ἰδὼν κάλλιστον ἀνδρῶν.*" Now, undoubtedly, "Seeing her son the fairest of men" has more sense than sound to boast of: but then, would not an Italian roll us out "Rimirando il figliuolo bellissimo degli uomini!" whereat Pindar, no less than Professor Jebb and Mr. Browning, *τριακτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.*

[1] *Poems by Matthew Arnold*, Preface.

It is recorded in the annals of Art[2] that there was once upon a time, practising so far north as Stockholm, a painter and picture-cleaner—sire of a less unhappy son—Old Muytens: and the annalist, Baron de Tessé, has not concealed his profound dissatisfaction at Old Muytens' conceit "to have himself had something to do with the work of whatever master of eminence might pass through his hands." Whence it was,—the Baron goes on to deplore,—that much detriment was done to that excellent piece "The Recognition of Achilles," by Rubens, through the perversity of Old Muytens, "who must needs take on him to beautify every nymph of the twenty by the bestowment of a widened eye and an enlarged mouth." I, at least, have left eyes and mouths everywhere as I found them, and this conservatism is all that claims praise for—what is, after all, *ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά.* No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded:" since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name. R. B.

LONDON: *October 1st*, 1877.

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

PERSONS.

Warder.
Choros of Old Men.
KLUTAIMNESTRA.
TALTHUBIOS, *Herald.*
AGAMEMNON.
KASSANDRA.
AIGISTHOS.

WARDER.

THE gods I ask deliverance from these labours,
Watch of a year's length whereby, slumbering through it
On the Atreidai's roofs on elbow,—dog-like—
I know of nightly star-groups the assemblage,
And those that bring to men winter and summer

[2] *Lettres à un jeune Prince*, traduites du Suédois.

Bright dynasts, as they pride them in the æther
—Stars, when they wither, and the uprisings of them.
And now on ward I wait the torch's token,
The glow of fire, shall bring from Troia message
And word of capture: so prevails audacious
The man's-way-planning hoping heart of woman.
But when I, driven from night-rest, dew-drenched hold to
This couch of mine—not looked upon by visions,
Since fear instead of sleep still stands beside me,
So as that fast I fix in sleep no eyelids—
And when to sing or chirp a tune I fancy,
For slumber such song-remedy infusing,
I wail then, for this House's fortune groaning,
Not, as of old, after the best ways governed.
Now, lucky be deliverance from these labours,
At good news—the appearing dusky fire!
O hail, thou lamp of night, a day-long lightness
Revealing, and of dances the ordainment!
Halloo, halloo!
To Agamemnon's wife I show, by shouting,
That, from bed starting up at once, i' the household
Joyous acclaim, good-omened to this torch-blaze,
She send aloft, if haply Ilion's city
Be taken, as the beacon boasts announcing.
Ay, and, for me, myself will dance a prelude,
For, that my masters' dice drop right, I'll reckon:
Since thrice-six has it thrown to me, this signal.
Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand
O' the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!
As for the rest, I'm mute: on tongue a big ox
Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take should,
Most plain would speak. So, willing I myself speak
To those who know: to who know not—I'm blankness.

CHOROS.

The tenth year this, since Priamos' great match,
King Menelaos, Agamemnon King,
—The strenuous yoke-pair of the Atreidai's honour
Two-throned, two-sceptred, whereof Zeus was donor—
Did from this land the aid, the armament despatch,
The thousand-sailored force of Argives clamouring
"Ares" from out the indignant breast, as fling
Passion forth vultures which, because of grief
Away,—as are their young ones,—with the thief,
Lofty above their brood-nests wheel in ring,
Row round and round with oar of either wing,
Lament the bedded chicks, lost labour that was love:
Which hearing, one above
—Whether Apollon, Pan or Zeus—that wail,
Sharp-piercing bird-shriek of the guests who fare
Housemates with gods in air—
Suchanone sends, against who these assail,
What, late-sent, shall not fail
Of punishing—Erinus. Here as there,
The Guardian of the Guest, Zeus, the excelling one,
Sends against Alexandros either son
Of Atreus: for that wife, the many-husbanded,
Appointing many a tug that tries the limb,
While the knee plays the prop in dust, while, shred
To morsels, lies the spear-shaft; in those grim
Marriage-prolusions when their Fury wed
Danaoi and Troes, both alike. All's said:
Things are where things are, and, as fate has willed,
So shall they be fulfilled.
Not gently-grieving, not just doling out

The drops of expiation—no, nor tears distilled—
Shall he we know of bring the hard about
To soft—that intense ire
At those mock rites unsanctified by fire.
But we pay nought here: through our flesh, age-weighed,
Left out from who gave aid
In that day,—we remain,
Staying on staves a strength
The equal of a child's at length.
For when young marrow in the breast doth reign,
That's the old man's match,—Ares out of place
In either: but in oldest age's case,
Foliage a-fading, why, he wends his way
On three feet, and, no stronger than a child,
Wanders about gone wild,
A dream in day.

But thou, Tundareus' daughter, Klutaimnestra queen,
What need? What new? What having heard or seen,
By what announcement's tidings, everywhere
Settest thou, round about, the sacrifice a-flare?
For, of all gods the city-swaying,
Those supernal, those infernal,
Those of the fields', those of the mart's obeying,—
The altars blaze with gifts;
And here and there, heaven-high the torch uplifts
Flame—medicated with persuasions mild,
With foul admixture unbeguiled—
Of holy unguent, from the clotted chrism
Brought from the palace, safe in its abysm.
Of these things, speaking what may be indeed
Both possible and lawful to concede,
Healer do thou become!—of this solicitude
Which, now, stands plainly forth of evil mood,
And, then . . . but from oblations, hope, to-day
Gracious appearing, wards away
From soul the insatiate care,
The sorrow at my breast, devouring there!

Empowered am I to sing
The omens, what their force which, journeying,
Rejoiced the potentates:
(For still, from God, inflates
My breast song-suasion: age,
Born to the business, still such war can wage)
—How the fierce bird against the Teukris land
Despatched, with spear and executing hand,
The Achaian's two-throned empery—o'er Hellas' youth
Two rulers with one mind:
The birds' king to these kings of ships, on high,
—The black sort, and the sort that's white behind,—
Appearing by the palace, on the spear-throw side,
In right sky-regions, visible far and wide,—
Devouring a hare-creature, great with young,
Baulked of more racings they, as she from whom they sprung!
Ah, Linos,[1] say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

The prudent army-prophet seeing two
The Atreidai, two their tempers, knew
Those feasting on the hare
The armament-conductors were;
And thus he spoke, explaining signs in view.
"In time, this outset takes the town of Priamos:
But all before its towers,—the people's wealth that was,
Of flocks and herds,—as sure, shall booty-sharing thence
Drain to the dregs away, by battle violence.
Only, have care lest grudge of any god disturb
With cloud the unsullied shine of that great force, the curb
Of Troia, struck with damp
Beforehand in the camp!
For envyingly is
The virgin Artemis
Toward—her father's flying hounds—this House—
The sacrificers of the piteous

[1] Taught Hercules music.

And cowering beast,
Brood and all, ere the birth: she hates the eagles' feast.
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

"Thus ready is the beauteous one with help
To those small dewdrop-things fierce lions whelp,
And udder-loving litter of each brute
That roams the mead; and therefore makes she suit,
The fair one, for fulfilment to the end
Of things these signs portend—
Which partly smile, indeed, but partly scowl—
The phantasms of the fowl.
I call Ieïos Paian[1] to avert
She work the Danaoi hurt
By any thwarting waftures, long and fast
Holdings from sail of ships:
And sacrifice, another than the last,
She for herself precipitate—
Something unlawful, feast for no man's lips,
Builder of quarrels, with the House cognate—
Having in awe no husband: for remains
A frightful, backward-darting in the path,
Wily house-keeping chronicler of wrath,
That has to punish that old children's fate!"
Such things did Kalchas,—with abundant gains
As well,—vociferate,
Predictions from the birds, in journeying,
Above the abode of either king.
With these, symphonious, sing—
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

Zeus, whosoe'er he be,—if that express
Aught dear to him on whom I call—
So do I him address.
I cannot liken out, by all
Admeasurement of powers,
Any but Zeus for refuge at such hours,
If veritably needs I must
From off my soul its vague care-burthen thrust.

[1] Apollo.

Not—whosoever was the great of yore,
Bursting to bloom with bravery all round—
Is in our mouths: he was, but is no more.
And who it was that after came to be,
Met the thrice-throwing wrestler,—he
Is also gone to ground.
But "Zeus"—if any, heart and soul, that name—
Shouting the triumph-praise—proclaim,
Complete in judgment shall that man be found.
Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise,
Appoints that suffering masterfully teach.
In sleep, before the heart of each,
A woe-remembering travail sheds in dew
Discretion,—ay, and melts the unwilling too
By what, perchance, may be a graciousness
Of gods, enforced no less,—
As they, commanders of the crew,
Assume the awful seat.

And then the old leader of the Achaian fleet,
Disparaging no seer—
With bated breath to suit misfortune's inrush here
—(What time it laboured, that Achaian host,
By stay from sailing,—every pulse at length
Emptied of vital strength,—
Hard over Kalchis shore-bound, current-crost
In Aulis station,—while the winds which post
From Strumon, ill-delayers, famine-fraught,
Tempters of man to sail where harbourage is naught,
Spendthrifts of ships and cables, turning time
To twice the length,—these carded, by delay,
To less and less away
The Argeians' flowery prime:
And when a remedy more grave and grand
Than aught before,—yea, for the storm and dearth,—
The prophet to the foremost in command
Shrieked forth, as cause of this
Adducing Artemis,
So that the Atreidai striking staves on earth
Could not withhold the tear)—
Then did the king, the elder, speak this clear.

"Heavy the fate, indeed,—to disobey!
Yet heavy if my child I slay,
The adornment of my household: with the tide
Of virgin-slaughter, at the altar-side,
A father's hands defiling: which the way
Without its evils, say?
How shall I turn fleet-fugitive,
Failing of duty to allies?
Since for a wind-abating sacrifice
And virgin blood,—'tis right they strive,
Nay, madden with desire.
Well may it work them—this that they require!"

But when he underwent necessity's
Yoke-trace,—from soul blowing unhallowed change
Unclean, abominable, — thence — another man—
The audacious mind of him began
Its wildest range.
For this it is gives mortals hardihood—
Some vice-devising miserable mood
Of madness, and first woe of all the brood.
The sacrificer of his daughter—strange!—
He dared become, to expedite
Woman-avenging warfare,—anchors weighed
With such prelusive rite!

Prayings and callings "Father"—naught they made
Of these, and of the virgin-age,—
Captains heart-set on war to wage!
His ministrants, vows done, the father bade—
Kid-like, above the altar, swathed in pall,
Take her—lift high, and have no fear at all,
Head-downward, and the fair mouth's guard
And frontage hold,—press hard
From utterance a curse against the House
By dint of bit—violence bridling speech.
And as to ground her saffron-vest she shed,
She smote the sacrificers all and each
With arrow sweet and piteous,
From the eye only sped,—
Significant of will to use a word,
Just as in pictures: since, full many a time,
In her sire's guest-hall, by the well-heaped board
Had she made music,—lovingly with chime
Of her chaste voice, that unpolluted thing,
Honoured the third libation, — paian that should bring
Good fortune to the sire she loved so well.

What followed—those things I nor saw nor tell.
But Kalchas' arts,—whate'er they indicate,—
Miss of fulfilment never: it is fate.
True, justice makes, in sufferers, a desire
To know the future woe preponderate.
But—hear before is need?
To that, farewell and welcome! 'tis the same, indeed,
As grief beforehand: clearly, part for part,
Conformably to Kalchas' art,
Shall come the event.
And be they as they may, things subsequent,—
What is to do, prosperity betide
E'en as we wish it!—we, the next allied,
Sole guarding barrier of the Apian land.

I am come, reverencing power in thee,
O Klutaimnestra! For 'tis just we bow
To the ruler's wife,—the male-seat man-bereaved.
But if thou, having heard good news,—or none,—
For good news' hope dost sacrifice thus wide,
I would hear gladly: art thou mute,—no grudge!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Good-news-announcer, may—as is the by-word—
Morn become, truly,—news from Night his mother!
But thou shalt learn joy past all hope of hearing.
Priamos' city have the Argeioi taken.

CHOROS.

How sayest? The word, from want of faith, escaped me.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia the Achaioi hold: do I speak plainly?

CHOROS.

Joy overcreeps me, calling forth the tear-drop.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Right! for, that glad thou art, thine eye convicts thee.

CHOROS.

For—what to thee, of all this, trusty token?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What's here! how else? unless the god have cheated.

CHOROS.

Haply thou flattering shows of dreams respectest?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No fancy would I take of soul sleep-burthened.

CHOROS.

But has there puffed thee up some unwinged omen?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

As a young maid's my mind thou mockest grossly.

CHOROS.

Well, at what time was—even sacked, the city?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Of this same mother Night—the dawn, I tell thee.

CHOROS.

And who of messengers could reach this swiftness?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Hephaistos[1]—sending a bright blaze from Ide.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward: Ide to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos: and a third great torch o' the island
Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.

1 Vulcan s festival.

And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,
Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place;
Who did not,—tardy,—caught, no wits about him,
By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards,
Kindling with flame a heap of grey old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying nowise,
Springing o'er Plain Asopos,—full-moon-fashion
Effulgent,—toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort—
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard—as burning more than burnings told you.
And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigiplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law—"to never stint the fire-stuff."
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigour,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost
Mount Arachnaios here, the city's neighbour;
And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Ide's fire not unforefathered!
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers:
He beats that's first and also last in running.
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

CHOROS.

The gods, indeed, anon will I pray, woman!
But now, these words to hear, and sate my wonder
Thoroughly, I am fain—if twice thou tell them.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia do the Achaioi hold, this same day.
I think a noise—no mixture—reigns i' the city.
Sour wine and unguent pour thou in one vessel—
Standers-apart, not lovers, wouldst thou style them:
And so, of captives and of conquerors, partwise
The voices are to hear, of fortune diverse.
For those, indeed, upon the bodies prostrate
Of husbands, brothers, children upon parents
—The old men, from a throat that's free no longer,
Shriekingly wail the death-doom of their dearest:
While these—the after-battle hungry labour,
Which prompts night-faring, marshals them to breakfast
On the town's store, according to no billet
Of sharing, but as each drew lot of fortune.
In the spear-captured Troic habitations
House they already: from the frosts upæthral
And dews delivered, will they, luckless creatures,
Without a watch to keep, slumber all night through.
And if they fear the gods, the city-guarders,
And the gods' structures of the conquered country,
They may not—capturers—soon in turn be captive.
But see no prior lust befall the army
To sack things sacred—by gain-cravings vanquished!
For there needs homeward the return's salvation,
To round the new limb back o' the double race-course.
And guilty to the gods if came the army,
Awakened up the sorrow of those slaughtered
Might be—should no outbursting evils happen.
But may good beat—no turn to see i' the balance!
For, many benefits I want the gain of.

CHOROS.

Woman, like prudent man thou kindly speakest.
And I, thus having heard thy trusty tokens,
The gods to rightly hail forthwith prepare me;
For, grace that must be paid has crowned our labours.

O Zeus the king, and friendly Night
Of these brave boons bestower—
Thou who didst fling on Troia's every tower
The o'er-roofing snare, that neither great thing might,
Nor any of the young ones, overpass
Captivity's great sweep-net—one and all
Of Ate held in thrall!
Ay, Zeus I fear—the guest's friend great—who was
The doer of this, and long since bent
The bow on Alexandros with intent
That neither wide o' the white
Nor o'er the stars the foolish dart should light.
The stroke of Zeus—they have it, as men say!
This, at least, from the source track forth we may!
As he ordained, so has he done.
"No"—said someone—
"The gods think fit to care
Nowise for mortals, such
As those by whom the good and fair
Of things denied their touch
Is trampled!" but he was profane.
That they do care, has been made plain
To offspring of the over-bold,
Outbreathing "Ares" greater than is just—
Houses that spill with more than they can hold,
More than is best for man. Be man's what must
Keep harm off, so that in himself he find
Sufficiency—the well-endowed of mind!
For there's no bulwark in man's wealth to him
Who, through a surfeit, kicks—into the dim
And disappearing—Right's great altar.

Yes—
It urges him, the sad persuasiveness,
Ate's insufferable child that schemes

Treason beforehand: and all cure is vain.
It is not hidden: out it glares again,
A light dread-lamping-mischief, just as gleams
The badness of the bronze;
Through rubbing, puttings to the touch,
Black-clotted is he, judged at once.
He seeks—the boy—a flying bird to clutch,
The insufferable brand
Setting upon the city of his land
Whereof not any god hears prayer;
While him who brought about such evils there,
That unjust man, the god in grapple throws.
Such an one, Paris goes
Within the Atreidai's house—
Shamed the guest's board by robbery of the spouse.

And, leaving to her townsmen throngs a-spread
With shields, and spear-thrusts of sea-armament,
And bringing Ilion, in a dowry's stead,
Destruction—swiftly through the gates she went,
Daring the undareable. But many a groan outbroke
From prophets of the House as thus they spoke.
"Woe, woe the House, the House and Rulers,—woe
The marriage-bed and dints
A husband's love imprints!
There she stands silent! meets no honour—no
Shame—sweetest still to see of things gone long ago!
And, through desire of one across the main,
A ghost will seem within the house to reign:
And hateful to the husband is the grace
Of well-shaped statues: from—in place of eyes
Those blanks—all Aphrodite dies.

"But dream-appearing mournful fantasies—
There they stand, bringing grace that's vain.
For vain 'tis, when brave things one seems to view;
The fantasy has floated off, hands through;
Gone, that appearance,—nowise left to creep,—
On wings, the servants in the paths of sleep!"
Woes, then, in household and on hearth, are such
As these—and woes surpassing these by much.
But not these only: everywhere—
For those who from the land
Of Hellas issued in a band,
Sorrow, the heart must bear,
Sits in the home of each, conspicuous there.
Many a circumstance, at least,
Touches the very breast.
For those
Whom any sent away,—he knows:
And in the live man's stead,
Armour and ashes reach
The house of each.

For Ares, gold-exchanger for the dead,
And balance-holder in the fight o' the spear,
Due-weight from Ilion sends—
What moves the tear on tear—
A charred scrap to the friends:
Filling with well-packed ashes every urn,
For man—that was—the sole return.
And they groan—praising much, the while,
Now this man as experienced in the strife,
Now that, fallen nobly on a slaughtered pile,
Because of—not his own—another's wife.
But things there be, one barks,
When no man harks:
A surreptitious grief that's grudge
Against the Atreidai who first sought the judge.
But some there, round the rampart, have
In Ilian earth, each one his grave:
All fair-formed as at birth,
It hid them—what they have and hold—the hostile earth.

And big with anger goes the city's word,
And pays a debt by public curse incurred.
And ever with me—as about to hear
A something night-involved—remains my fear:
Since of the many-slayers—not
Unwatching are the gods.

The black Erinues, at due periods—
Whoever gains the lot
Of fortune with no right—
Him, by life's strain and stress
Back-again-beaten from success,
They strike blind: and among the out-of-sight
For who has got to be, avails no might.
The being praised outrageously
Is grave, for at the eyes of such an one
Is launched, from Zeus, the thunder-stone.
Therefore do I decide
For so much and no more prosperity
Than of his envy passes unespied.
Neither a city-sacker would I be,
Nor life, myself by others captive, see.

A swift report has gone our city through,
From fire, the good-news messenger: if true,
Who knows? Or is it not a god-sent lie?
Who is so childish and deprived of sense
That, having, at announcements of the flame
Thus novel, felt his own heart fired thereby,
He then shall at a change of evidence,
Be worsted just the same?
It is conspicuous in a woman's nature,
Before its view to take a grace for granted:
Too trustful,—on her boundary, usurpature
Is swiftly made;
But swiftly, too, decayed,
The glory perishes by woman vaunted.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Soon shall we know—of these light-bearing torches,
And beacons and exchanges, fire with fire—
If they are true, indeed, or if, dream-fashion,
This gladsome light came and deceived our judgment.
Yon herald from the shore I see, o'ershadowed
With boughs of olive: dust, mud's thirsty brother,
Close neighbours on his garb, thus testify me
That neither voiceless, nor yet kindling for thee
Mountain-wood-flame, shall he explain by fire-smoke:
But either tell out more the joyance, speaking. . . .
Word contrary to which, I aught but love it!
For may good be—to good that's known—appendage!

CHOROS.

Whoever prays for aught else to this city
—May he himself reap fruit of his mind's error!

HERALD.

Ha, my forefathers' soil of earth Argeian!
Thee, in this year's tenth light, am I returned to—
Of many broken hopes, on one hope chancing;
For never prayed I, in this earth Argeian
Dying, to share my part in tomb the dearest.
Now, hail thou earth, and hail thou also, sunlight,
And Zeus, the country's lord, and king the Puthian
From bow no longer urging at us arrows!
Enough, beside Skamandros, cam'st thou adverse:
Now, contrary, be saviour thou and healer,
O king Apollon! And gods conquest-granting,
All—I invoke too, and my tutelary
Hermes, dear herald, heralds' veneration,—
And Heroes our forthsenders,—friendly, once more
The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings!
Ha, mansions of my monarchs, roofs beloved,
And awful seats, and deities sun-fronting—
Receive with pomp your monarch, long time absent!
For he comes bringing light in night-time to you,
In common with all these—king Agamemnon.
But kindly greet him—for clear shows your duty—
Who has dug under Troia with the mattock
Of Zeus the Avenger, whereby plains are outploughed,
Altars unrecognizable, and gods' shrines,
And the whole land's seed thoroughly has perished.
And such a yoke-strap having cast round Troia,
The elder king Atreides, happy man—he

Comes to be honoured, worthiest of what mortals
Now are. Nor Paris nor the accomplicecity
Outvaunts their deed as more than they are done-by:
For, in a suit for rape and theft found guilty,
He missed of plunder and, in one destruction,
Fatherland, house and home has mowed to atoms:
Debts the Priamidai have paid twice over.

CHOROS.

Hail, herald from the army of Achaians!

HERALD.

I hail:—to die, will gainsay gods no longer!

CHOROS.

Love of this fatherland did exercise thee?

HERALD.

So that I weep, at least, with joy, my eyes full.

CHOROS.

What, of this gracious sickness were ye gainers?

HERALD.

How now? instructed, I this speech shall master.

CHOROS.

For those who loved you back, with longing stricken.

HERALD.

This land yearned for the yearning army, say'st thou?

CHOROS.

So as to set me oft, from dark mind, groaning.

HERALD.

Whence came this ill mind—hatred to the army?

CHOROS.

Of old, I use, for mischief's physic, silence.

HERALD.

And how, the chiefs away, did you fear any?

CHOROS.

So that now,—late thy word,—much joy were —dying!

HERALD.

For well have things been worked out; these, —in much time,
Some of them, one might say, had luck in falling,
While some were faulty: since who, gods excepted,
Goes, through the whole time of his life, ungrieving?
For labours should I tell of, and bad lodgments,
Narrow deckways ill-strewn, too,—what the day's woe
We did not groan at getting for our portion?
As for land-things, again, on went more hatred!
Since beds were ours hard by the foemen's ramparts,
And, out of heaven and from the earth, the meadow
Dews kept a-sprinkle, an abiding damage
Of vestures, making hair a wild-beast matting.
Winter, too, if one told of it—bird-slaying—
Such as, unbearable, Idaian snow brought—
Or heat, when waveless, on its noontide couches
Without a wind, the sea would slumber falling
—Why must one mourn these? O'er and gone is labour:
O'er and gone is it, even to those dead ones,
So that no more again they mind uprising.
Why must we tell in numbers those deprived ones,
And the live man be vexed with fate's fresh outbreak?
Rather, I bid full farewell to misfortunes!
For us, the left from out the Argeian army,
The gain beats, nor does sorrow counterbalance.
So that 'tis fitly boasted of, this sunlight,
By us, o'er sea and land the aery flyers,
"Troia at last taking, the band of Argives
Hang up such trophies to the gods of Hellas

Within their domes — new glory to grow ancient!"
Such things men having heard must praise the city
And army-leaders: and the grace which wrought them—
Of Zeus, shall honoured be. Thou hast my whole word.

CHOROS.

O'ercome by words, their sense I do not gainsay.
For, aye this breeds youth in the old—"to learn well."
But these things most the house and Klutaimnestra
Concern, 'tis likely: while they make me rich, too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

I shouted long ago, indeed, for joyance,
When came that first night-messenger of fire
Proclaiming Ilion's capture and dispersion.
And someone, girding me, said, "Through fire-bearers
Persuaded—Troia to be sacked now, thinkest?
Truly, the woman's way,—high to lift heart up!"
By such words I was made seem wit-bewildered:
Yet still I sacrificed; and, — female-song with,—
A shout one man and other, through the city,
Set up, congratulating in the gods' seats,
Soothing the incense-eating flame right fragrant.
And now, what's more, indeed, why need'st thou tell me?
I of the king himself shall learn the whole word:
And,—as may best be,—I my revered husband
Shall hasten, as he comes back, to receive: for—
What's to a wife sweeter to see than this light
(Her husband, by the god saved, back from warfare)
So as to open gates? This tell my husband—
To come at soonest to his loving city.
A faithful wife at home may he find, coming!
Such an one as he left—the dog o' the household—
Trusty to him, adverse to the ill-minded,
And, in all else, the same: no signet-impress
Having done harm to, in that time's duration.
I know nor pleasure, nor blameworthy converse
With any other man more than—bronze-dippings!

HERALD.

Such boast as this—brimful of the veracious—
Is, for a high-born dame, not bad to send forth!

CHOROS.

Ay, she spoke thus to thee—that hast a knowledge
From clear interpreters — a speech most seemly.
But speak thou, herald! Meneleos I ask of:
If he, returning, back in safety also
Will come with you—this land's beloved chieftain?

HERALD.

There's no way I might say things false and pleasant
For friends to reap the fruits of through a long time.

CHOROS.

How then if, speaking good, things true thou chance on?

HERALD.

For not well-hidden things become they, sundered.
The man has vanished from the Achaic army,
He and his ship too. I announce no falsehood.

CHOROS.

Whether forth-putting openly from Ilion,
Or did storm—wide woe—snatch him from the army?

HERALD.

Like topping bowman, thou hast touched the target,
And a long sorrow hast succinctly spoken.

CHOROS.

Whether, then, of him, as a live or dead man
Was the report by other sailors bruited?

HERALD.

Nobody knows so as to tell out clearly
Excepting Helios who sustains earth's nature.

CHOROS.

How say'st thou then, did storm the naval army
Attack and end, by the celestials' anger?

HERALD.

It suits not to defile a day auspicious
With ill-announcing speech: distinct each god's due:
And when a messenger with gloomy visage
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes—God ward off!—
One popular wound that happens to the city,
And many sacrificed from many households—
Men, scourged by that two-thonged whip Ares loves so,
Double spear-headed curse, bloody yoke-couple,—
Of woes like these, doubtless, whoe'er comes weighted,
Him does it suit to sing the Erinues' paian.
But who, of matters saved a glad-news-bringer,
Comes to a city in good estate rejoicing. . . .
How shall I mix good things with evil, telling
Of storm against the Achaioi, urged by gods' wrath?
For they swore league, being arch-foes before that,
Fire and the sea: and plighted troth approved they,
Destroying the unhappy Argeian army.
At night began the bad-wave-outbreak evils;
For, ships against each other Threkian breezes
Shattered: and these, butted at in a fury
By storm and typhoon, with surge rain-resounding,—
Off they went, vanished, thro' a bad herd's whirling.
And, when returned the brilliant light of Helios,
We view the Aigaian sea on flower with corpses
Of men Achaian and with naval ravage.
But us indeed, and ship, unhurt i' the hull too,
Either someone outstole us or outprayed us—
Some god—no man it was the tiller touching.
And Fortune, saviour, willing on our ship sat.
So as it neither had in harbour wave-surge
Nor ran aground against a shore all rocky.
And then, the water-Haides having fled from
In the white day, not trusting to our fortune,
We chewed the cud in thoughts—this novel sorrow
O' the army labouring and badly pounded.
And now—if anyone of them is breathing—
They talk of us as having perished: why not?
And we—that they the same fate have, imagine.
May it be for the best! Meneleos, then,
Foremost and specially to come, expect thou!
If (that is) any ray o' the sun reports him
Living and seeing to—by Zeus' contrivings,
Not yet disposed to quite destroy the lineage—
Some hope is he shall come again to household.
Having heard such things, know, thou truth art hearing!

CHOROS.

Who may he have been that named thus wholly with exactitude—
(Was he someone whom we see not, by forecastings of the future
Guiding tongue in happy mood?)
—Her with battle for a bridegroom, on all sides contention-wooed,
Helena? Since—mark the suture!—
Ship's-Hell, Man's-Hell, City's-Hell,
From the delicately-pompous curtains that pavilion well,
Forth, by favour of the gale
Of earth-born Zephuros did she sail.
Many shield-bearers, leaders of the pack,
Sailed too upon their track,

Theirs who had directed oar,
Then visible no more,
To Simois' leaf-luxuriant shore—
For sake of strife all gore!

To Ilion Wrath, fulfilling her intent,
This marriage-care—the rightly named so—
sent:
In after-time, for the tables' abuse
And that of the hearth-partaker Zeus,
Bringing to punishment
Those who honoured with noisy throat
The honour of the bride, the hymenæal note
Which did the kinsfolk then to singing urge.
But, learning a new hymn for that which
was,
The ancient city of Priamos
Groans probably a great and general dirge,
Denominating Paris
"The man that miserably marries:"—
She who, all the while before,
A life, that was a general dirge
For citizens' unhappy slaughter, bore.

And thus a man, by no milk's help,
Within his household reared a lion's whelp
That loved the teat
In life's first festal stage:
Gentle as yet,
A true child-lover, and, to men of age,
A thing whereat pride warms;
And oft he had it in his arms
Like any new-born babe, bright-faced, to
hand
Wagging its tail, at belly's strict command.

But in due time upgrown,
The custom of progenitors was shown:
For—thanks for sustenance repaying
With ravage of sheep slaughtered—
It made unbidden feast;
With blood the house was watered,
To household came a woe there was no stay-
ing:
Great mischief many-slaying!
From God it was—some priest
Of Ate, in the house, by nurture thus in-
creased.

At first, then, to the city of Ilion went
A soul, as I might say, of windless calm—
Wealth's quiet ornament,
An eyes'-dart bearing balm,
Love's spirit-biting flower.
But—from the true course bending—
She brought about, of marriage, bitter ending:
Ill-resident, ill-mate, in power
Passing to the Priamidai—by sending
Of Hospitable Zeus—
Erinus for a bride,—to make brides mourn,
her dower.

Spoken long ago
Was the ancient saying
Still among mortals staying:
"Man's great prosperity at height of rise
Engenders offspring nor unchilded dies;
And, from good fortune, to such families,
Buds forth insatiate woe."
Whereas, distinct from any,
Of my own mind I am:
For 'tis the unholy deed begets the many,
Resembling each its dam.
Of households that correctly estimate,
Ever a beauteous child is born of Fate.
But ancient Arrogance delights to generate
Arrogance, young and strong mid mortals'
sorrow,
Or now, or then, when comes the appointed
morrow.
And she bears young Satiety;
And, fiend with whom nor fight nor war
can be,
Unholy Daring—twin black Curses
Within the household, children like their
nurses.

But Justice shines in smoke-grimed habita-
tions,
And honours the well-omened life;
While,—gold-besprinkled stations
Where the hands' filth is rife,
With backward-turning eyes
Leaving,—to holy seats she hies,
Not worshipping the power of wealth
Stamped with applause by stealth:
And to its end directs each thing begun.

Approach then, my monarch, of Troia the sacker, of Atreus the son!
How ought I address thee, how ought I revere thee,—nor yet overhitting
Nor yet underbending the grace that is fitting?
Many of mortals hasten to honour the seeming-to-be—
Passing by justice: and, with the ill-faring, to groan as he groans all are free.
But no bite of the sorrow their liver has reached to:
They say with the joyful,—one outside on each, too,
As they force to a smile smileless faces.
But whoever is good at distinguishing races
In sheep of his flock—it is not for the eyes
Of a man to escape such a shepherd's surprise,
As they seem, from a well-wishing mind,
In watery friendship to fawn and be kind.
Thou to me, then, indeed, sending an army for Helena's sake,
(I will not conceal it) wast—oh, by no help of the Muses!—depicted
Not well of thy midriff the rudder directing,—convicted
Of bringing a boldness they did not desire to the men with existence at stake.
But now—from no outside of mind, nor unlovingly—gracious thou art
To those who have ended the labour, fulfilling their part;
And in time shalt thou know, by inquiry instructed,
Who of citizens justly, and who not to purpose, the city conducted.

AGAMEMNON.

First, indeed, Argos, and the gods, the local,
'Tis right addressing—those with me the partners
In this return and right things done the city
Of Priamos: gods who, from no tongue hearing
The rights o' the cause, for Ilion's fate manslaught'rous
Into the bloody vase, not oscillating,
Put the vote-pebbles, while, o' the rival vessel,
Hope rose up to the lip-edge: filled it was not.
By smoke the captured city is still conspicuous:
Ate's burnt offerings live: and, dying with them,
The ash sends forth the fulsome blasts of riches.
Of these things, to the gods grace many-mindful
'Tis right I render, since both nets outrageous
We built them round with, and, for sake of woman,
It did the city to dust—the Argeian monster,
The horse's nestling, the shield-bearing people
That made a leap, at setting of the Pleiads,
And, vaulting o'er the tower, the raw-flesh-feeding
Lion licked up his fill of blood tyrannic.
I to the gods indeed prolonged this preface;
But—as for *thy* thought, I remember hearing—
I say the same, and thou co-pleader hast me.
Since few of men this faculty is born with—
To honour, without grudge, their friend, successful.
For moody, on the heart, a poison seated
Its burthen doubles to who gained the sickness:
By his own griefs he is himself made heavy,
And out-of-door prosperity seeing groans at.
Knowing, I'd call (for well have I experienced)
"Fellowship's mirror," "phantom of a shadow,"
Those seeming to be mighty gracious to me:
While just Odusseus—he who sailed not willing—
When joined on, was to me the ready trace-horse.
This of him, whether dead or whether living,
I say. For other city-and-gods' concernment—
Appointing common courts, in full assemblage
We will consult. And as for what holds seemly—
How it may lasting stay well, must be counselled:
While what has need of medicines Paionian
We, either burning or else cutting kindly,
Will make endeavour to turn pain from sickness.

And now into the domes and homes by altar
Going, I to the gods first raise the right-hand—
They who, far sending, back again have brought me.
And Victory, since she followed, fixed remain she!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Men, citizens, Argeians here, my worships!
I shall not shame me, consort-loving manners
To tell before you: for in time there dies off
The diffidence from people. Not from others
Learning, I of myself will tell the hard life
I bore so long as this man was 'neath Ilion.
First: for a woman, from the male divided,
To sit at home alone, is monstrous evil—
Hearing the many rumours back-revenging:
And for now This to come, now That bring after
Woe, and still worse woe, bawling in the household!
And truly, if so many wounds had chanced on
My husband here, as homeward used to dribble
Report, he's pierced more than a net to speak of!
While, were he dying (as the words abounded)
A triple-bodied Geruon the Second,
Plenty above—for loads below I count not—
Of earth a three-share cloak he'd boast of taking,
Once only dying in each several figure!
Because of suchlike rumours back-revenging,
Many the halters from my neck, above head,
Others than *I* loosed—loosed from neck by main force!
From this cause, sure, the boy stands not beside me—
Possessor of our troth-plights, thine and mine too—
As ought Orestes: be not thou astonished!
For, him brings up our well-disposed guest-captive
Strophios the Phokian—ills that told on both sides
To me predicting—both of thee 'neath Ilion
The danger, and if anarchy's mob-uproar
Should overthrow thy council; since 'tis born with
Mortals,—whoe'er has fallen, the more to kick him.
Such an excuse, I think, no cunning carries!
As for myself—why, of my wails the rushing
Fountains are dried up: not in them a drop more!
And in my late-to-bed eyes I have damage,
Bewailing what concerned thee, those torch-holdings
For ever unattended to. In dreams—why,
Beneath the light wing-beats o' the gnat, I woke up
As he went buzzing—sorrows that concerned thee
Seeing, that filled more than their fellow-sleep-time.
Now, all this having suffered, from soul grief-free
I would style this man here the dog o' the stables,
The saviour forestay of the ship, the high roof's
Ground-prop, son sole-begotten to his father,
—Ay, land appearing to the sailors past hope,
Loveliest day to see after a tempest,
To the wayfaring-one athirst a well-spring,
—The joy, in short, of 'scaping all that's—fatal!
I judge him worth addresses such as these are
—Envy stand off!—for many those old evils
We underwent. And now, to me—dear headship!—
Dismount thou from this car, not earthward setting
The foot of thine, O king, that's Ilion's spoiler!
Slave-maids, why tarry?—whose the task allotted
To strew the soil o' the road with carpet-spreadings.
Immediately be purple-strewn the pathway,
So that to home unhoped may lead him—Justice!
As for the rest, care shall—by no sleep conquered—
Dispose things—justly (gods to aid!) appointed.

AGAMEMNON.

Offspring of Leda, of my household warder,
Suitably to my absence hast thou spoken,
For long the speech thou didst outstretch! But aptly
To praise—from others ought to go this favour.
And for the rest,—not me, in woman's fashion,
Mollify, nor—as mode of barbarous man is—
To me gape forth a groundward-falling clamour!
Nor, strewing it with garments, make my passage
Envied! Gods, sure, with these behoves we honour:
But, for a mortal on these varied beauties
To walk—to me, indeed, is nowise fear-free.
I say—as man, not god, to me do homage!
Apart from foot-mats both and varied vestures,
Renown is loud, and—not to lose one's senses,
God's greatest gift. Behoves we him call happy
Who has brought life to end in loved well-being.
If all things I might manage thus—brave man, I!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Come now, this say, nor feign a feeling to me!

AGAMEMNON.

With feeling, know indeed, I do not tamper!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Vowed'st thou to the gods, in fear, to act thus?

AGAMEMNON.

If any, *I* well knew resolve I outspoke.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What think'st thou Priamos had done, thus victor?

AGAMEMNON.

On varied vests—I do think—he had passaged.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Then, do not, struck with awe at human censure. . . .

AGAMEMNON.

Well, popular mob-outcry much avails too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ay, but the unenvied is not the much valued.

AGAMEMNON.

Sure, 'tis no woman's part to long for battle.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, to the prosperous, even suits a beating.

AGAMEMNON.

What? thou this beating us in war dost prize too?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Persuade thee! power, for once, grant *me*—and willing!

AGAMEMNON.

But if this seem so to thee—shoes, let someone
Loose under, quick—foot's serviceable carriage!
And me, on these sea-products walking, may no
Grudge from a distance, from the god's eye, strike at!
For great shame were my strewment-spoiling—riches
Spoiling with feet, and silver-purchased textures!
Of these things, thus then. But this female-stranger
Tenderly take inside! Who conquers mildly
God, from afar, benignantly regardeth.
For, willing, no one wears a yoke that's servile:
And she, of many valuables, outpicked
The flower, the army's gift, myself has followed.
So,—since to hear thee, I am brought about thus,—
I go into the palace—purples treading.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

There is the sea—and what man shall exhaust it?—
Feeding much purple's worth-its-weight-in-silver
Dye, ever fresh and fresh, our garments' tincture;

At home, such wealth, king, we begin—by gods' help—
With having, and to lack, the household knows not.
Of many garments had I vowed a treading
(In oracles if fore-enjoined the household)
Of this dear soul the safe-return-price scheming!
For, root existing, foliage goes up houses,
O'erspreading shadow against Seirios dog-star;
And, thou returning to the hearth domestic,
Warmth, yea, in winter dost thou show returning.
And when, too, Zeus works, from the green-grape acrid,
Wine—then, already, cool in houses cometh—
The perfect man his home perambulating!
Zeus, Zeus Perfecter, these my prayers perfect thou!
Thy care be—yea—of things thou mayst make perfect!

CHOROS.

Wherefore to me, this fear—
Groundedly stationed here
Fronting my heart, the portent-watcher—flits she?
Wherefore should prophet-play
The uncalled and unpaid lay,
Nor—having spat forth fear, like bad dreams—sits she
On the mind's throne beloved—well-suasive Boldness?
For time, since, by a throw of all the hands,
The boat's stern-cables touched the sands,
Has passed from youth to oldness,—
When under Ilion rushed the ship-borne bands.

And from my eyes I learn—
Being myself my witness—their return.
Yet, all the same, without a lyre, my soul,
Itself its teacher too, chants from within
Erinus' dirge, not having now the whole
Of Hope's dear boldness: nor my inwards sin—
The heart that's rolled in whirls against the mind
Justly presageful of a fate behind.
But I pray—things false, from my hope, may fall
Into the fate that's not-fulfilled-at-all!

Especially at least, of health that's great
The term's insatiable: for, its weight
—A neighbour, with a common wall between—
Ever will sickness lean;
And destiny, her course pursuing straight,
Has struck man's ship against a reef unseen.
Now, when a portion, rather than the treasure,
Fear casts from sling, with peril in right measure,
It has not sunk—the universal freight,
(With misery freighted over-full)
Nor has fear whelmed the hull.
Then too the gift of Zeus,
Two-handedly profuse,
Even from the furrows' yield for yearly use
Has done away with famine, the disease;
But blood of man to earth once falling—deadly, black—
In times ere these,—
Who may, by singing spells, call back?
Zeus had not else stopped one who rightly knew
The way to bring the dead again.
But, did not an appointed Fate constrain
The Fate from gods, to bear no more than due,
My heart, outstripping what tongue utters,
Would have all out: which now, in darkness, mutters
Moodily grieved, nor ever hopes to find
How she a word in season may unwind
From out the enkindling mind.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Take thyself in, thou too—I say, Kassandra!
Since Zeus—not angrily—in household placed thee
Partaker of hand-sprinklings, with the many
Slaves stationed, his the Owner's altar close to.

Descend from out this car, nor be high-minded!
And truly they do say Alkmenê's child once
Bore being sold, slaves' barley-bread his living.
If, then, necessity of this lot o'erbalance,
Much is the favour of old-wealthy masters:
For those who, never hoping, made fine harvest
Are harsh to slaves in all things, beyond measure.
Thou hast—with us—such usage as law warrants.

CHOROS.

To thee it was, she paused plain speech from speaking.
Being inside the fatal nets—obeying,
Thou mayst obey: but thou mayst disobey too!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, if she is not, in the swallow's fashion,
Possessed of voice that's unknown and barbaric,
I, with speech—speaking in mind's scope—persuade her.

CHOROS.

Follow! The best—as things now stand—she speaks of.
Obey thou, leaving this thy car-enthronement!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Well, with this thing at door, for me no leisure
To waste time: as concerns the hearth mid-navelled,
Already stand the sheep for fireside slaying
By those who never hoped to have such favour.
If thou, then, aught of this wilt do, delay not!
But if thou, being witless, tak'st no word in,
Speak thou, instead of voice, with hand as Kars do!

CHOROS.

She seems a plain interpreter in need of,
The stranger! and her way—a beast's new-captured!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, she is mad, sure,—hears her own bad senses,—
Who, while she comes, leaving a town new-captured,
Yet knows not how to bear the bit o' the bridle
Before she has out-frothed her bloody fierceness.
Not I—throwing away more words—will shamed be!

CHOROS.

But I,—for I compassionate,—will chafe not
Come, O unhappy one, this car vacating,
Yielding to this necessity, prove yoke's use!

KASSANDRA.

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Why didst thou "ototoi" concerning Loxias?
Since he is none such as to suit a mourner.

KASSANDRA.

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Ill-boding here again the god invokes she
—Nowise empowered in woes to stand by helpful.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
For thou hast quite, this second time, destroyed me.

CHOROS.

To prophesy she seems of her own evils:
Remains the god-gift to the slave-soul present.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
Ha, whither hast thou led me? to what roof now?

CHOROS.

To the Atreidai's roof: if this thou know'st not,
I tell it thee, nor this wilt thou call falsehood.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
God-hated, then! Of many a crime it knew—
Self-slaying evils, halters too:
Man's-shambles, blood-besprinkler of the ground!

CHOROS.

She seems to be good-nosed, the stranger: dog-like,
She snuffs indeed the victims she will find there.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
By the witnesses here I am certain now!
These children bewailing their slaughters—flesh dressed in the fire
And devoured by their sire!

CHOROS.

Ay, we have heard of thy soothsaying glory,
Doubtless: but prophets none are we in scent of!

KASSANDRA.

Ah, gods, what ever does she meditate?
What this new anguish great?
Great in the house here she meditates ill
Such as friends cannot bear, cannot cure it: and still
Off stands all Resistance
Afar in the distance!

CHOROS.

Of these I witless am—these prophesyings.
But those I knew: for the whole city bruits them.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, unhappy one, this thou consummatest?
Thy husband, thy bed's common guest,
In the bath having brightened . . . How shall I declare
Consummation? It soon will be there:
For hand after hand she outstretches,
At life as she reaches!

CHOROS.

Nor yet I've gone with thee! for—after riddles—
Now, in blind oracles, I feel resourceless.

KASSANDRA.

Eh, eh, papai, papai,
What this, I espy?
Some net of Haides undoubtedly!
Nay, rather, the snare
Is she who has share
In his bed, who takes part in the murder there!
But may a revolt—
Unceasing assault—
On the Race, raise a shout
Sacrificial, about
A victim—by stoning—
For murder atoning!

CHOROS.

What this Erinus which i' the house thou callest
To raise her cry? Not me thy word enlightens!
To my heart has run
A drop of the crocus-dye:
Which makes for those
On earth by the spear that lie,
A common close
With life's descending sun.
Swift is the curse begun!

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
See—see quick!
Keep the bull from the cow!
In the vesture she catching him, strikes him now
With the black-horned trick,
And he falls in the watery vase!
Of the craft-killing cauldron I tell thee the case!

CHOROS.

I would not boast to be a topping critic
Of oracles: but to some sort of evil

I liken these. From oracles, what good speech
To mortals, beside, is sent?
It comes of their evils: these arts word-abounding that sing the event
Bring the fear 'tis their office to teach.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me—
Of me unhappy, evil-destined fortunes!
For I bewail my proper woe
As, mine with his, all into one I throw.
Why hast thou hither me unhappy brought?
—Unless that I should die with him—for nought!
What else was sought?

CHOROS.

Thou art some mind-mazed creature, god-possessed:
And all about thyself dost wail
A lay—no lay!
Like some brown nightingale
Insatiable of noise, who—well-away!—
From her unhappy breast
Keeps moaning Itus, Itus, and his life
With evils, flourishing on each side, rife.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me,
The fate o' the nightingale, the clear resounder!
For a body wing-borne have the gods cast round her,
And sweet existence, from misfortunes free:
But for myself remains a sundering
With spear, the two-edged thing!

CHOROS.

Whence hast thou this on-rushing god-involving pain
And spasms in vain?
For, things that terrify,
With changing unintelligible cry
Thou strikest up in tune, yet all the while
After that Orthian style![1]
Whence hast thou limits to the oracular road,
That evils bode?

1 The Diamastigosis.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the nuptials, the nuptials of Paris, the deadly to friends!
Ah me, of Skamandros the draught
Paternal! There once, to these ends,
On thy banks was I brought,
The unhappy! And now, by Kokutos and Acheron's shore
I shall soon be, it seems, these my oracles singing once more!

CHOROS.

Why this word, plain too much,
Hast thou uttered? A babe might learn of such!
I am struck with a bloody bite—here under—
At the fate woe-wreaking
Of thee shrill shrieking:
To me who hear—a wonder!

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the toils—the toils of the city
The wholly destroyed: ah, pity,
Of the sacrificings my father made
In the ramparts' aid—
Much slaughter of grass-fed flocks—that afforded no cure
That the city should not, as it does now, the burthen endure!
But I, with the soul on fire,
Soon to the earth shall cast me and expire.

CHOROS.

To things, on the former consequent,
Again hast thou given vent:
And 'tis some evil-meaning fiend doth move thee,
Heavily falling from above thee,
To melodize thy sorrows—else, in singing,
Calamitous, death-bringing!
And of all this the end
I am without resource to apprehend.

KASSANDRA.

Well then, the oracle from veils no longer
Shall be outlooking, like a bride new-married:
But bright it seems, against the sun's uprisings

Breathing, to penetrate thee: so as, wave-like,
To wash against the rays a woe much greater
Than this. I will no longer teach by riddles.
And witness, running with me, that of evils
Done long ago, I nosing track the footstep!
For, this same roof here—never quits a Choros
One-voiced, not well-tuned since no "well" it utters:
And truly having drunk, to get more courage,
Man's blood—the Komos keeps within the household
—Hard to be sent outside—of sister Furies:
They hymn their hymn—within the house close sitting—
The first beginning curse: in turn spit forth at
The Brother's bed, to him who spurned it hostile.
Have I missed aught, or hit I like a bowman?
False prophet am I,—knock at doors, a babbler?
Henceforward witness, swearing now, I know not
By other's word the old sins of this household!

CHOROS.

And how should oath, bond honourably binding,
Become thy cure? No less I wonder at thee
—That thou, beyond sea reared, a strange-tongued city
Shouldst hit in speaking, just as if thou stood'st by!

KASSANDRA.

Prophet Apollon put me in this office.

CHOROS.

What, even though a god, with longing smitten?

KASSANDRA.

At first, indeed, shame was to me to say this.

CHOROS.

For, more relaxed grows everyone who fares well.

KASSANDRA.

But he was athlete to me—huge grace breathing!

CHOROS.

Well, to the work of children, went ye law's way?

KASSANDRA.

Having consented, I played false to Loxias.

CHOROS.

Already when the wits inspired possessed of?

KASSANDRA.

Already townsmen all their woes I foretold.

CHOROS.

How wast thou then unhurt by Loxias' anger?

KASSANDRA.

I no one aught persuaded, when I sinned thus.

CHOROS.

To us, at least, now sooth to say thou seemest.

KASSANDRA.

Halloo, halloo, ah, evils!
Again, straightforward foresight's fearful labour
Whirls me, distracting with prelusive lays!
Behold ye those there, in the household seated,—
Young ones,—of dreams approaching to the figures?
Children, as if they died by their beloveds—
Hands they have filled with flesh, the meal domestic—
Entrails and vitals both, most piteous burthen,
Plain they are holding!—which their father tasted!
For this, I say, plans punishment a certain
Lion ignoble, on the bed that wallows,
House-guard (ah, me!) to the returning master
—Mine, since to bear the slavish yoke behoves me!
The ship's commander, Ilion's desolator,
Knows not what things the tongue of the lewd she-dog
Speaking, outspreading, shiny-souled, in fashion
Of Ate hid, will reach to, by ill fortune!

Such things she dares—the female, the male's slayer!
She is . . . how calling her the hateful bite-beast
May I hit the mark? Some amphisbaina,—Skulla
Housing in rocks, of mariners the mischief,
Revelling Haides' mother,—curse, no truce with,
Breathing at friends! How piously she shouted,
The all-courageous, as at turn of battle!
She seems to joy at the back-bringing safety!
Of this, too, if I nought persuade, all's one! Why?
What is to be will come. And soon thou, present,
"True prophet all too much" wilt pitying style me.

CHOROS.

Thuestes' feast, indeed, on flesh of children,
I went with, and I shuddered. Fear too holds me
Listing what's true as life, nowise out-imaged.

KASSANDRA.

I say, thou Agamemnon's fate shalt look on.

CHOROS.

Speak good words, O unhappy! Set mouth sleeping!

KASSANDRA.

But Paian stands in no stead to the speech here.

CHOROS.

Nay, if the thing be near: but never be it!

KASSANDRA.

Thou, indeed, prayest: they to kill are busy.

CHOROS.

Of what man is it ministered, this sorrow?

KASSANDRA.

There again, wide thou look'st of my fore-tellings.

CHOROS.

For, the fulfiller's scheme I have not gone with.

KASSANDRA.

And yet too well I know the speech Hellenic.

CHOROS.

For Puthian oracles, thy speech, and hard too.

KASSANDRA.

Papai: what fire this! and it comes upon me!
Ototoi, Lukeion Apollon, ah me—me!
She, the two-footed lioness that sleeps with
The wolf, in absence of the generous lion,
Kills me the unhappy one: and as a poison
Brewing, to put my price too in the anger,
She vows, against her mate this weapon whetting
To pay him back the bringing me, with slaughter.
Why keep I then these things to make me laughed at,
Both wands and, round my neck, oracular fillets?
Thee, at least, ere my own fate will I ruin:
Go, to perdition falling! Boons exchange we—
Some other Ate in my stead make wealthy!
See there—himself, Apollon stripping from me
The oracular garment! having looked upon me
—Even in these adornments, laughed by friends at,
As good as foes, i' the balance weighed: and vainly—
For, called crazed stroller,—as I had been gipsy,
Beggar, unhappy, starved to death,—I bore it.
And now the Prophet—prophet me undoing,
Has led away to these so deadly fortunes!
Instead of my sire's altar, waits the hack-block
She struck with first warm bloody sacrificing!
Yet nowise unavenged of gods will death be:
For there shall come another, our avenger,
The mother-slaying scion, father's dooms-man:
Fugitive, wanderer, from this land an exile,

Back shall he come,—for friends, copestone these curses!
For there is sworn a great oath from the gods that
Him shall bring hither his fallen sire's prostration.
Why make I then, like an indweller, moaning?
Since at the first I foresaw Ilion's city
Suffering as it has suffered: and who took it,
Thus by the judgment of the gods are faring.
I go, will suffer, will submit to dying!
But, Haides' gates—these same I call, I speak to,
And pray that on an opportune blow chancing,
Without a struggle,—blood the calm death bringing
In easy outflow,—I this eye may close up!

CHOROS.

O much unhappy, but, again, much learned
Woman, long hast thou outstretched! But if truly
Thou knowest thine own fate, how comes that, like to
A god-led steer, to altar bold thou treadest?

KASSANDRA.

There's no avoidance,—strangers, no! Some time more!

CHOROS.

He last is, anyhow, by time advantaged.

KASSANDRA.

It comes, the day: I shall by flight gain little.

CHOROS.

But know thou patient art from thy brave spirit!

KASSANDRA.

Such things hears no one of the happy-fortuned.

CHOROS.

But gloriously to die—for man is grace, sure.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, sire, for thee and for thy noble children!

CHOROS.

But what thing is it? What fear turns thee backwards?

KASSANDRA.

Alas, alas!

CHOROS.

Why this "Alas!" if 'tis no spirit's loathing?

KASSANDRA.

Slaughter blood-dripping does the household smell of!

CHOROS.

How else? This scent is of hearth-sacrifices.

KASSANDRA.

Such kind of steam as from a tomb is proper!

CHOROS.

No Surian honour to the House thou speak'st of!

KASSANDRA.

But I will go,—even in the household wailing
My fate and Agamemnon's. Life suffice me!
Ah, strangers!
I cry not "ah"—as bird at bush—through terror
Idly! to me, the dead this much bear witness:
When, for me—woman, there shall die a woman,
And, for a man ill-wived, a man shall perish!
This hospitality I ask as dying.

CHOROS.

O sufferer, thee—thy foretold fate I pity.

KASSANDRA.

Yet once for all, to speak a speech, I fain am:
No dirge, mine for myself! The sun I pray to,
Fronting his last light!—to my own avengers—
That from my hateful slayers they exact too
Pay for the dead slave—easy-managed hand's work!

CHOROS.

Alas for mortal matters! Happy-fortuned,—
Why, any shade would turn them: if unhappy,

By throws the wetting sponge has spoiled the picture!
And more by much in mortals this I pity.
The being well-to-do—
Insatiate a desire of this
Born with all mortals is,
Nor any is there who
Well-being forces off, aroints
From roofs whereat a finger points,
"No more come in!" exclaiming. This man, too,
To take the city of Priamos did the celestials give,
And, honoured by the god, he homeward comes;
But now if, of the former, he shall pay
The blood back, and, for those who ceased to live,
Dying, for deaths in turn new punishment he dooms—
Who, being mortal, would not pray
With an unmischievous
Daimon to have been born—who would not, hearing thus?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! I am struck—a right-aimed stroke within me!

CHOROS.

Silence! Who is it shouts "stroke"—"right-aimedly" a wounded one?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! indeed again,—a second, struck by!

CHOROS.

This work seems to me completed by this "Ah me" of the king's;
But we somehow may together share in solid counsellings.

CHOROS 1.

I, in the first place, my opinion tell you:
—To cite the townsmen, by help-cry, to house here.

CHOROS 2.

To me, it seems we ought to fall upon them
At quickest—prove the fact by sword fresh-flowing!

CHOROS 3.

And I, of such opinion the partaker,
Vote—to do something: not to wait—the main point!

CHOROS 4.

'Tis plain to see: for they prelude as though of
A tyranny the signs they gave the city.

CHOROS 5.

For we waste time; while they,—this waiting's glory
Treading to ground,—allow the hand no slumber.

CHOROS 6.

I know not—chancing on some plan—to tell it:
'Tis for the doer to plan of the deed also.

CHOROS 7.

And I am such another: since I'm schemeless
How to raise up again by words—a dead man!

CHOROS 8.

What, and, protracting life, shall we give way thus
To the disgracers of our home, these rulers?

CHOROS 9.

Why, 'tis unbearable: but to die is better:
For death than tyranny is the riper finish!

CHOROS 10.

What, by the testifying "Ah me" of him,
Shall we prognosticate the man as perished?

CHOROS 11.

We must quite know ere speak these things concerning:
For to conjecture and "quite know" are two things.

CHOROS 12.

This same to praise I from all sides abound in—
Clearly to know—Atreides, what he's doing!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Much having been before to purpose spoken,
The opposite to say I shall not shamed be:

For how should one, to enemies,—in semblance,
Friends,—enmity proposing,—sorrow's net-frame
Enclose, a height superior to outleaping?
To me, indeed, this struggle of old—not mindless
Of an old victory—came: with time, I grant you!
I stand where I have struck, things once accomplished:
And so have done,—and this deny I shall not,—
As that his fate was nor to fly nor ward off.
A wrap-round with no outlet, as for fishes,
I fence about him—the rich woe of the garment:
I strike him twice, and in a double "Ah-me!"
He let his limbs go—*there!* And to him, fallen,
The third blow add I, giving—of Below-ground
Zeus, guardian of the dead—the votive favour.
Thus in the mind of him he rages, falling,
And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
With the dark drop of slaughterous dew—rejoicing
No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx.
Since so these things are,—Argives, my revered here,—
Ye may rejoice—if ye rejoice: but I—boast!
If it were fit on corpse to pour libation,
That would be right—right over and above, too!
The cup of evils in the house he, having
Filled with such curses, himself coming drinks of.

CHOROS.

We wonder at thy tongue: since bold-mouthed truly
Is she who in such speech boasts o'er her husband!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ye test me as I were a witless woman:
But I—with heart intrepid—to you knowers
Say (and thou—if thou wilt or praise or blame me,
Comes to the same)—this man is Agamemnon,
My husband, dead, the work of the right hand here,
Ay, of a just artificer: so things are.

CHOROS.

What evil, O woman, food or drink, earth-bred
Or sent from the flowing sea,
Of such having fed
Didst thou set on thee
This sacrifice
And popular cries
Of a curse on thy head?
Off thou hast thrown him, off hast cut
The man from the city: but—
Off from the city thyself shalt be
Cut—to the citizens
A hate immense!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, indeed, thou adjudgest exile to me,
And citizens' hate, and to have popular curses:
Nothing of this against the man here bringing,
Who, no more awe-checked than as 'twere a beast's fate,—
With sheep abundant in the well-fleeced graze-flocks,—
Sacrificed *his* child,—dearest fruit of travail
To me,—as song-spell against Threkian blowings.
Not *him* did it behove thee hence to banish
—Pollution's penalty? But hearing *my* deeds
Justicer rough thou art! Now, this I tell thee:
To threaten thus—me, one prepared to have thee
(On like conditions, thy hand conquering) o'er me
Rule: but if God the opposite ordain us,
Thou shalt learn—late taught, certes—to be modest.

CHOROS.

Greatly-intending thou art:
Much-mindful, too, hast thou cried

(Since thy mind, with its slaughter-outpouring part,
Is frantic) that over the eyes, a patch
Of blood—with blood to match—
Is plain for a pride!
Yet still, bereft of friends, thy fate
Is—blow with blow to expiate!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

And this thou hearest—of my oaths, just warrant!
By who fulfilled things for my daughter, Justice,
Ate, Erinus,—by whose help I slew him,—
Not mine the fancy—Fear will tread my palace
So long as on my hearth there burns a fire,
Aigisthos as before well-caring for me;
Since he to me is shield, no small, of boldness.
Here does he lie—outrager of this female,
Dainty of all the Chruseids under Ilion;
And she—the captive, the soothsayer also
And couchmate of this man, oracle-speaker,
Faithful bed-fellow,—ay, the sailors' benches
They wore in common, nor unpunished did so,
Since he is—thus! While, as for her,—swan-fashion,
Her latest having chanted,—dying wailing
She lies,—to him, a sweetheart: me she brought to—
My bed's by-nicety—the whet of dalliance.

CHOROS.

Alas, that some
Fate would come
Upon us in quickness—
Neither much sickness
Neither bed-keeping—
And bear unended sleeping,
Now that subdued
Is our keeper, the kindest of mood!
Having borne, for a woman's sake, much strife—
By a woman he withered from life!
Ah me!
Law-breaking Helena who, one,
Hast many, so many souls undone
'Neath Troia! and now the consummated
Much-memorable curse
Hast thou made flower-forth, red
With the blood no rains disperse,
That which was then in the House—
Strife all-subduing, the woe of a spouse.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, of death the fate—
Burdened by these things—supplicate!
Nor on Helena turn thy wrath
As the man-destroyer, as "she who hath,
Being but one,
Many and many a soul undone
Of the men, the Danaoi"—
And wrought immense annoy!

CHOROS.

Daimon, who fallest
Upon this household and the double-raced
Tantalidai, a rule, minded like theirs displaced,
Thou rulest me with, now,
Whose heart thou gallest!
And on the body, like a hateful crow,
Stationed, all out of tune, his chant to chant
Doth Something vaunt!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, of a truth, hast thou set upright
Thy mouth's opinion,—
Naming the Sprite,
The triply gross,
O'er the race that has dominion:
For through him it is that Eros
The carnage-licker
In the belly is bred: ere ended quite
Is the elder throe—new ichor!

CHOROS.

Certainly, great of might
And heavy of wrath, the Sprite
Thou tellest of, in the palace
(Woe, woe!)
—An evil tale of a fate
By Ate's malice
Rendered insatiate!
Oh, oh,—

King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou boastest this deed to be mine:
But leave off styling me
"The Agamemnonian wife!"
For, showing himself in sign
Of the spouse of the corpse thou dost see,
Did the ancient bitter avenging-ghost
Of Atreus, savage host,
Pay the man here as price—
A full-grown for the young one's sacrifice.

CHOROS.

That no cause, indeed, of this killing art thou,
Who shall be witness-bearer?
How shall he bear it—how?
But the sire's avenging-ghost might be in the deed a sharer.
He is forced on and on
By the kin-born flowing of blood,
—Black Ares: to where, having gone,
He shall leave off, flowing done,
At the frozen-child's-flesh food.
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No death "unfit for the free"
Do I think this man's to be:
For did not himself a slavish curse
To his household decree?
But the scion of him, myself did nurse—
That much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he
Having done well by,—and as well, nor worse,
Been done to,—let him not in Haides loudly
Bear himself proudly!
Being by sword-destroying death amerced
For that sword's punishment himself inflicted first.

CHOROS.

I at a loss am left—
Of a feasible scheme of mind bereft—
Where I may turn: for the house is falling:
I fear the bloody crash of the rain
That ruins the roof as it bursts amain:
The warning-drop
Has come to a stop.
Destiny doth Justice whet
For other deed of hurt, on other whetstones yet.
Woe, earth, earth—would thou hadst taken *me*
Ere I saw the man I see,
On the pallet-bed
Of the silver-sided bath-vase, dead!
Who is it shall bury him, who
Sing his dirge? Can it be true
That *thou* wilt dare this same to do—
Having slain thy husband, thine own,
To make his funeral moan:
And for the soul of him, in place
Of his mighty deeds, a graceless grace
To wickedly institute? By whom
Shall the tale of praise o'er the tomb
At the god-like man be sent—
From the truth of his mind as he toils intent?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

It belongs not to thee to declare
This object of care!
By us did he fall—down there!
Did he die—down there! and down, no less,
We will bury him there, and not beneath
The wails of the household over his death:
But Iphigeneia,—with kindliness,—
His daughter,—as the case requires,
Facing him full, at the rapid-flowing
Passage of Groans shall—both hands throwing
Around him—kiss that kindest of sires!

CHOROS.

This blame comes in the place of blame:
Hard battle it is to judge each claim.
"He is borne away who bears away:
And the killer has all to pay."
And this remains while Zeus is remaining,
"The doer shall suffer in time"—for, such his ordaining.
Who may cast out of the House its cursed brood?
The race is to Ate glued!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou hast gone into this oracle
With a true result. For me, then,—I will
—To the Daimon of the Pleisthenidai
Making an oath—with all these things comply
Hard as they are to bear. For the rest—
Going from out this House, a guest,
May he wear some other family
To nought, with the deaths of kin by kin!
And,—keeping a little part of my goods,—
Wholly am I contented in
Having expelled from the royal House
These frenzied moods
The mutually-murderous.

AIGISTHOS.

O light propitious of day justice-bringing!
I may say truly, now, that men's avengers,
The gods from high, of earth behold the sorrows—
Seeing, as I have, i' the spun robes of the Erinues,
This man here lying,—sight to me how pleasant!—
His father's hands' contrivances repaying.
For Atreus, this land's lord, of this man father,
Thuestes, my own father—to speak clearly—
His brother too,—being i' the rule contested,—
Drove forth to exile from both town and household:
And, coming back, to the hearth turned, a suppliant,
Wretched Thuestes found the fate assured him
—Not to die, bloodying his paternal threshold
Just there: but host-wise this man's impious father
Atreus, soul-keenly more than kindly,—seeming
To joyous hold a flesh-day,—to my father
Served up a meal, the flesh of his own children.
The feet indeed and the hands' top divisions
He hid, high up and isolated sitting:
But, their unshowing parts in ignorance taking,
He forthwith eats food—as thou seest—perdition
To the race: and then, 'ware of the deed ill-omened,
He shrieked O!—falls back, vomiting, from the carnage,
And fate on the Pelopidai past bearing
He prays down—putting in his curse together
The kicking down o' the feast—that so might perish
The race of Pleisthenes entire: and thence is
That it is given thee to see this man prostrate.
And I was rightly of this slaughter stitch-man:
Since me,—being third from ten,—with my poor father
He drives out—being then a babe in swathe-bands:
But, grown up, back again has justice brought me:
And of this man I got hold—being without-doors—
Fitting together the whole scheme of ill-will.
So, sweet, in fine, even to die were to me,
Seeing, as I have, this man i' the toils of justice!

CHOROS.

Aigisthos, arrogance in ills I love not.
Dost thou say—willing, thou didst kill the man here,
And, alone, plot this lamentable slaughter?
I say—thy head in justice will escape not
The people's throwing—know that!—stones and curses!

AIGISTHOS.

Thou such things soundest—seated at the lower
Oarage to those who rule at the ship's mid-bench?
Thou shalt know, being old, how heavy is teaching

To one of the like age—bidden be modest!
But chains and old age and the pangs of fasting
Stand out before all else in teaching,—prophets
At souls'-cure! Dost not, seeing aught, see this too?
Against goads kick not, lest tript-up thou suffer!

CHOROS.

Woman, thou,—of him coming new from battle
Houseguard—thy husband's bed the while disgracing,—
For the Army-leader didst thou plan this fate too?

AIGISTHOS.

These words too are of groans the prime-begetters!
Truly a tongue opposed to Orpheus hast thou:
For he led all things by his voice's grace-charm,
But thou, upstirring them by these wild yelpings,
Wilt lead them! Forced, thou wilt appear the tamer!

CHOROS.

So—thou shalt be my king then of the Argeians—
Who, not when for this man his fate thou plannedst,
Daredst to do this deed—thyself the slayer!

AIGISTHOS.

For, to deceive him was the wife's part, certes:
I was looked after—foe, ay, old-begotten!
But out of this man's wealth will I endeavour
To rule the citizens: and the no-man-minder
—Him will I heavily yoke—by no means trace-horse,
A corned-up colt! but that bad friend in darkness,
Famine its housemate, shall behold him gentle.

CHOROS.

Why then, this man here, from a coward spirit,
Didst not thou slay thyself? But,—helped,—a woman,
The country's pest, and that of gods o' the country,
Killed him! Orestes, where may he see light now?
That coming hither back, with gracious fortune,
Of both these he may be the all-conquering slayer?

AIGISTHOS.

But since this to do thou thinkest—and not talk—thou soon shalt know!
Up then, comrades dear! the proper thing to do—not distant this!

CHOROS.

Up then! hilt in hold, his sword let everyone aright dispose!

AIGISTHOS.

Ay, but I myself too, hilt in hold, do not refuse to die.

CHOROS.

Thou wilt die, thou say'st, to who accept it. We the chance demand.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, O belovedest of men, may we do other ills!
To have reaped away these, even, is a harvest much to me.
Go, both thou and these the old men, to the homes appointed each,
Ere ye suffer! It behoved one do these things just as we did:
And if of these troubles there should be enough—we may assent
—By the Daimon's heavy heel unfortunately stricken ones!
So a woman's counsel hath it—if one judge it learning-worth.

AIGISTHOS.

But to think that these at me the idle tongue should thus o'erbloom,
And throw out such words—the Daimon's power experimenting on—
And, of modest knowledge missing,—me, the ruler, . . .

CHOROS.

Ne'er may this befall Argeians—wicked man to fawn before!

AIGISTHOS.

Anyhow, in after days, will I, yes, I, be at thee yet!

CHOROS.

Not if hither should the Daimon make Orestes straightway come!

AIGISTHOS.

O, I know, myself, that fugitives on hopes are pasture-fed!

CHOROS.

Do thy deed, get fat, defiling justice, since the power is thine!

AIGISTHOS.

Know that thou shalt give me satisfaction for this folly's sake!

CHOROS.

Boast on, bearing thee audacious, like a cock his females by!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Have not thou respect for these same idle yelpings! I and thou
Will arrange it, o'er this household ruling excellently well.

LA SAISIAZ.

1878.

[The name of a villa near Geneva; means The Sun. A. E. S. stands for Ann Egerton-Smith, who, whilst spending the autumn of 1877 with Mr. and Miss Browning at La Saisiaz, died suddenly of heart disease on the morning of the 14th of September.]

I.

Good, to forgive;
Best, to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
Soul, clap thy pinion!
Earth have dominion,
Body, o'er thee!

II.

Wander at will,
Day after day,—
Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber:
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

III.

Waft of soul's wing!
What lies above?
Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
Ferns of all feather,
Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

LA SAISIAZ.

A. E. S. September 14, 1877.

Dared and done: at last I stand upon the summit, Dear and True!
Singly dared and done; the climbing both of us were bound to do.
Petty feat and yet prodigious: every side my glance was bent
O'er the grandeur and the beauty lavished through the whole ascent.
Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and now immense:
Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in evidence!
And no berry in its hiding, no blue space in its outspread,
Pleaded to escape my footstep, challenged my emerging head,
(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched by shrub and tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn set free,
Stationed face to face with—Nature? rather with Infinitude)
—No revealment of them all, as singly I my path pursued,
But a bitter touched its sweetness, for the thought stung "Even so
Both of us had loved and wondered just the same, five days ago!"
Five short days, sufficient hardly to entice, from out its den
Splintered in the slab, this pink perfection of the cyclamen;
Scarce enough to heal and coat with amber gum the sloe-tree's gash,
Bronze the clustered wilding apple, redden ripe the mountain-ash:
Yet of might to place between us—Oh the barrier! Yon Profound
Shrinks beside it, proves a pin-point: barrier this, without a bound!

Boundless though it be, I reach you: somehow seem to have you here
—Who are there. Yes, there you dwell now, plain the four low walls appear;
Those are vineyards they enclose from; and the little spire which points
—That's Collonge, henceforth your dwelling. All the same, howe'er disjoints
Past from present, no less certain you are here, not there: have dared,
Done the feat of mountain-climbing,—five days since, we both prepared
Daring, doing, arm in arm, if other help should haply fail.
For you asked, as forth we sallied to see sunset from the vale,
"Why not try for once the mountain,—take a foretaste, snatch by stealth
Sight and sound, some unconsidered fragment of the hoarded wealth?
Six weeks at its base, yet never once have we together won
Sight or sound by honest climbing: let us two have dared and done
Just so much of twilight journey as may prove to-morrow's jaunt
Not the only mode of wayfare—wheeled to reach the eagle's haunt!"
So, we turned from the low grass-path you were pleased to call "your own,"
Set our faces to the rose-bloom o'er the summit's front of stone
Where Salève obtains, from Jura and the sunken sun she hides,
Due return of blushing "Good Night," rosy as a borne-off bride's,
For his masculine "Good Morrow" when, with sunrise still in hold,
Gay he hails her, and, magnific, thrilled her black length burns to gold.
Up and up we went, how careless—nay, how joyous! All was new,
All was strange. "Call progress toilsome? that were just insulting you!
How the trees must temper noontide! Ah, the thicket's sudden break!
What will be the morning glory, when at dusk thus gleams the lake?
Light by light puts forth Geneva: what a land—and, of the land,
Can there be a lovelier station than this spot where now we stand?
Is it late, and wrong to linger? True, to-morrow makes amends.
Toilsome progress? child's play, call it—specially when one descends!
There, the dread descent is over—hardly our adventure, though!
Take the vale where late we left it, pace the grass-path, 'mine,' you know!
Proud completion of achievement!" And we paced it, praising still
That soft tread on velvet verdure as it wound through hill and hill;
And at very end there met us, coming from Collonge, the pair
—All our people of the Chalet—two, enough and none to spare.
So, we made for home together, and we reached it as the stars
One by one came lamping—chiefly that prepotency of Mars—
And your last word was "I owe you this enjoyment!"—met with "Nay:
With yourself it rests to have a month of morrows like to-day!"
Then the meal, with talk and laughter, and the news of that rare nook
Yet untroubled by the tourist, touched on by no travel-book,
All the same—though latent—patent, hybrid birth of land and sea,
And (our travelled friend assured you)—if such miracle might be—
Comparable for completeness of both blessings—all around
Nature, and, inside her circle, safety from world's sight and sound—
Comparable to our Saisiaz. "Hold it fast and guard it well!
Go and see and vouch for certain, then come back and never tell

Living soul but us; and haply, prove our sky from cloud as clear,
There may we four meet, praise fortune just as now, another year!"

Thus you charged him on departure: not without the final charge
"Mind to-morrow's early meeting! We must leave our journey marge
Ample for the wayside wonders: there's the stoppage at the inn
Three-parts up the mountain, where the hardships of the track begin;
There's the convent worth a visit; but, the triumph crowning all—
There's Salève's own platform facing glory which strikes greatness small,
—Blanc, supreme above his earth-brood, needles red and white and green,
Horns of silver, fangs of crystal set on edge in his demesne.
So, some three weeks since, we saw them: so, to-morrow we intend
You shall see them likewise; therefore Good Night till to-morrow, friend!"
Last, the nothings that extinguish embers of a vivid day:
"What might be the Marshal's next move, what Gambetta's counter-play?"
Till the landing on the staircase saw escape the latest spark:
"Sleep you well!" "Sleep but as well, you!"—lazy love quenched, all was dark.

Nothing dark next day at sundawn! Up I rose and forth I fared:
Took my plunge within the bath-pool, pacified the watch-dog scared,
Saw proceed the transmutation—Jura's black to one gold glow,
Trod your level path that let me drink the morning deep and slow,
Reached the little quarry—ravage recompensed by shrub and fern—
Till the overflowing ardours told me time was for return.
So, return I did, and gaily. But, for once, from no far mound
Waved salute a tall white figure. "Has her sleep been so profound?
Foresight, rather, prudent saving strength for day's expenditure!
Ay, the chamber-window's open: out and on the terrace, sure!"

No, the terrace showed no figure, tall, white, leaning through the wreaths,
Tangle-twine of leaf and bloom that intercept the air one breathes,
Interpose between one's love and Nature's loving, hill and dale
Down to where the blue lake's wrinkle marks the river's inrush pale
—Mazy Arve: whereon no vessel but goes sliding white and plain,
Not a steamboat pants from harbour but one hears pulsate amain,
Past the city's congregated peace of homes and pomp of spires
—Man's mild protest that there's something more than Nature, man requires,
And that, useful as is Nature to attract the tourist's foot,
Quiet slow sure money-making proves the matter's very root,—
Need for body,—while the spirit also needs a comfort reached
By no help of lake or mountain, but the texts whence Calvin preached.
"Here's the veil withdrawn from landscape: up to Jura and beyond,
All awaits us ranged and ready; yet she violates the bond,
Neither leans nor looks nor listens: why is this?" A turn of eye
Took the whole sole answer, gave the undisputed reason "why!"

This dread way you had your summons! No premonitory touch,
As you talked and laughed ('tis told me) scarce a minute ere the clutch
Captured you in cold forever. Cold? nay, warm you were as life
When I raised you, while the others used, in passionate poor strife,

All the means that seemed to promise any aid, and all in vain.
Gone you were, and I shall never see that earnest face again
Grow transparent, grow transfigured with the sudden light that leapt,
At the first word's provocation, from the heart-deeps where it slept.

Therefore, paying piteous duty, what seemed You have we consigned
Peacefully to—what I think were, of all earth-beds, to your mind
Most the choice for quiet, yonder: low walls stop the vines' approach,
Lovingly Salève protects you; village-sports will ne'er encroach
On the stranger lady's silence, whom friends bore so kind and well
Thither "just for love's sake,"—such their own word was: and who can tell?
You supposed that few or none had known and loved you in the world:
May be! flower that's full-blown tempts the butterfly, not flower that's furled.
But more learned sense unlocked you, loosed the sheath and let expand
Bud to bell and outspread flower-shape at the least warm touch of hand
—Maybe, throb of heart, beneath which,—quickening farther than it knew,—
Treasure oft was disembosomed, scent all strange and unguessed hue.
Disembosomed, re-embosomed,—must one memory suffice,
Prove I knew an Alpine-rose which all beside named Edelweiss?

Rare thing, red or white, you rest now: two days slumbered through; and since
One day more will see me rid of this same scene whereat I wince,
Tetchy at all sights and sounds and pettish at each idle charm
Proffered me who pace now singly where we two went arm in arm,—
I have turned upon my weakness: asked "And what, forsooth, prevents
That, this latest day allowed me, I fulfil of her intents
One she had the most at heart—that we should thus again survey
From Salève Mont Blanc together?" Therefore,—dared and done to-day
Climbing,—here I stand: but you—where?

If a spirit of the place
Broke the silence, bade me question, promised answer,—what disgrace
Did I stipulate "Provided answer suit my hopes, not fears!"
Would I shrink to learn my life-time's limit —days, weeks, months or years?
Would I shirk assurance on each point whereat I can but guess—
"Does the soul survive the body? Is there God's self, no or yes?"
If I know my mood, 'twere constant—come in whatsoe'er uncouth
Shape it should, nay, formidable—so the answer were but truth.

Well, and wherefore shall it daunt me, when 'tis I myself am tasked,
When, by weakness weakness questioned, weakly answers—weakly asked?
Weakness never needs be falseness: truth is truth in each degree
—Thunderpealed by God to Nature, whispered by my soul to me.
Nay, the weakness turns to strength and triumphs in a truth beyond:
"Mine is but man's truest answer—how were it did God respond?"
I shall no more dare to mimic such response in futile speech,
Pass off human lisp as echo of the sphere-song out of reach,
Than,—because it well may happen yonder, where the far snows blanch
Mute Mont Blanc, that who stands near them sees and hears an avalanche,—
I shall pick a clod and throw,—cry "Such the sight and such the sound!
What though I nor see nor hear them? Others do, the proofs abound!"

Can I make my eye an eagle's, sharpen ear to recognize
Sound o'er league and league of silence? Can I know, who but surmise?
If I dared no self-deception when, a week since, I and you
Walked and talked along the grass-path, passing lightly in review
What seemed hits and what seemed misses in a certain fence-play,—strife
Sundry minds of mark engaged in "On the Soul and Future Life,"—
If I ventured estimating what was come of parried thrust,
Subtle stroke, and, rightly, wrongly, estimating could be just
—Just, though life so seemed abundant in the form which moved by mine,
I might well have played at feigning, fooling, —laughed "What need opine
Pleasure must succeed to pleasure, else past pleasure turns to pain,
And this first life claims a second, else I count its good no gain?"—
Much less have I heart to palter when the matter to decide
Now becomes "Was ending ending once and always, when you died?"
Did the face, the form I lifted as it lay, reveal the loss
Not alone of life but soul? A tribute to yon flowers and moss,
What of you remains beside? A memory! Easy to attest
"Certainly from out the world that one believes who knew her best
Such was good in her, such fair, which fair and good were great perchance
Had but fortune favoured, bidden each shy faculty advance;
After all—who knows another? Only as I know, I speak."
So much of you lives within me while I live my year or week.
Then my fellow takes the tale up, not unwilling to aver
Duly in his turn "I knew him best of all, as he knew her:
Such he was, and such he was not, and such other might have been
But that somehow every actor, somewhere in this earthly scene,
Fails." And so both memories dwindle, yours and mine together linked,
Till there is but left for comfort, when the last spark proves extinct,
This—that somewhere new existence led by men and women new
Possibly attains perfection coveted by me and you;
While ourselves, the only witness to what work our life evolved,
Only to ourselves proposing problems proper to be solved
By ourselves alone,—who working ne'er shall know if work bear fruit
Others reap and garner, heedless how produced by stalk and root,—
We who, darkling, timed the day's birth,—struggling, testified to peace,—
Earned, by dint of failure, triumph,—we, creative thought, must cease
In created word, thought's echo, due to impulse long since sped!
Why repine? There's ever someone lives although ourselves be dead!

Well, what signifies repugnance? Truth is truth howe'er it strike.
Fair or foul the lot apportioned life on earth, we bear alike.
Stalwart body idly yoked to stunted spirit, powers, that fain
Else would soar, condemned to grovel, groundlings through the fleshly chain,—
Help that hinders, hindrance proved but help disguised when all too late,—
Hindrance is the fact acknowledged, howso-e'er explained as Fate,
Fortune, Providence: we bear, own life a burthen more or less.
Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happiness
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we count

Life a curse and not a blessing, summed-up
in its whole amount,
Help and hindrance, joy and sorrow?
Why should I want courage here?
I will ask and have an answer,—with no
favour, with no fear,—
From myself. How much, how little, do I
inwardly believe
True that controverted doctrine? Is it fact
to which I cleave,
Is it fancy I but cherish, when I take upon
my lips
Phrase the solemn Tuscan fashioned, and
declare the soul's eclipse
Not the soul's extinction? take his "I believe
and I declare—
Certain am I—from this life I pass into a
better, there
Where that lady lives of whom enamoured
was my soul"—where this
Other lady, my companion dear and true, she
also is?

I have questioned and am answered. Question, answer presuppose
Two points: that the thing itself which
questions, answers,—*is*, it knows;
As it also knows the thing perceived outside
itself,—a force
Actual ere its own beginning, operative through
its course,
Unaffected by its end,—that this thing likewise needs must be;
Call this—God, then, call that—soul, and
both—the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? that they o'erpass
my power of proving, proves them
such:
Fact it is I know I know not something
which is fact as much.
What before caused all the causes, what effect
of all effects
Haply follows,—these are fancy. Ask the
rush if it suspects
Whence and how the stream which floats it
had a rise, and where and how
Falls or flows on still! What answer makes
the rush except that now
Certainly it floats and is, and, no less certain
than itself,
Is the everyway external stream that now
through shoal and shelf
Floats it onward, leaves it—may be—wrecked
at last, or lands on shore
There to root again and grow and flourish
stable evermore.
—May be! mere surmise not knowledge:
much conjecture styled belief,
What the rush conceives the stream means
through the voyage blind and brief.
Why, because I doubtless am, shall I as
doubtless be? "Because
God seems good and wise." Yet under this
our life's apparent laws
Reigns a wrong which, righted once, would
give quite other laws to life.
"He seems potent." Potent here, then:
why are right and wrong at strife?
Has in life the wrong the better? Happily
life ends so soon!
Right predominates in life? Then why two
lives and double boon?
"Anyhow, we want it: wherefore want?"
Because, without the want,
Life, now human, would be brutish: just
that hope, however scant,
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the
hope therein away,
All we have to do is surely not endure
another day.
This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that
promise joy: life done—
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete
fulfilment? none.
"But the soul is not the body:" and the
breath is not the flute;
Both together make the music: either marred
and all is mute.
Truce to such old sad contention whence,
according as we shape
Most of hope or most of fear, we issue in a
half-escape:
"We believe" is sighed. I take the cup of
comfort proffered thus,
Taste and try each soft ingredient, sweet
infusion, and discuss

What their blending may accomplish for the cure of doubt, till—slow,
Sorrowful, but how decided! needs must I o'erturn it—so!
Cause before, effect behind me—blanks! The midway point I am,
Caused, itself—itself efficient: in that narrow space must cram
All experience—out of which there crowds conjecture manifold,
But, as knowledge, this comes only—things may be as I behold,
Or may not be, but, without me and above me, things there are;
I myself am what I know not—ignorance which proves no bar
To the knowledge that I am, and, since I am, can recognize
What to me is pain and pleasure: this is sure, the rest—surmise.
If my fellows are or are not, what may please them and what pain,—
Mere surmise: my own experience—that is knowledge, once again!

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated, learnt and taught
This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,
If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probation-space,
Mine, for me. But those apparent other mortals—theirs, for them?
Knowledge stands on my experience: all outside its narrow hem,
Free surmise may sport and welcome! Pleasures, pains affect mankind
Just as they affect myself? Why, here's my neighbour colour-blind,
Eyes like mine to all appearance: "green as grass" do I affirm?
"Red as grass" he contradicts me: which employs the proper term?
Were we two the earth's sole tenants, with no third for referee,
How should I distinguish? Just so, God must judge 'twixt man and me.
To each mortal peradventure earth becomes a new machine,
Pain and pleasure no more tally in our sense than red and green;
Still, without what seems such mortal's pleasure, pain, my life were lost
—Life, my whole sole chance to prove—although at man's apparent cost—
What is beauteous and what ugly, right to strive for, right to shun,
Fit to help and fit to hinder,—prove my forces everyone,
Good and evil,—learn life's lesson, hate of evil, love of good,
As 'tis set me, understand so much as may be understood—
Solve the problem: "From thine apprehended scheme of things, deduce
Praise or blame of its contriver, shown a niggard or profuse
In each good or evil issue! nor miscalculate alike
Counting one the other in the final balance, which to strike,
Soul was born and life allotted: ay, the show of things unfurled
For thy summing-up and judgment,—thine, no other mortal's world!"

What though fancy scarce may grapple with the complex and immense
—"His own world for every mortal?" Postulate omnipotence!
Limit power, and simple grows the complex: shrunk to atom size,
That which loomed immense to fancy low before my reason lies,—
I survey it and pronounce it work like other work: success
Here and there, the workman's glory,—here and there, his shame no less,

Failure as conspicuous. Taunt not "Human
work ape work divine?"
As the power, expect performance! God's
be God's as mine is mine!
God whose power made man and made man's
wants, and made, to meet those wants,
Heaven and earth which, through the body,
prove the spirit's ministrants,
Excellently all,—did He lack power or was
the will in fault
When He let blue heaven be shrouded o'er
by vapours of the vault,
Gay earth drop her garlands shrivelled at the
first infecting breath
Of the serpent pains which herald, swarming
in, the dragon death?
What, no way but this that man may learn
and lay to heart how rife
Life were with delights would only death
allow their taste to life?
Must the rose sigh "Pluck—I perish!" must
the eve weep "Gaze—I fade!"
—Every sweet warn "'Ware my bitter!"
every shine bid "Wait my shade"?
Can we love but on condition, that the thing
we love must die?
Needs there groan a world in anguish just to
teach us sympathy—
Multitudinously wretched that we, wretched
too, may guess
What a preferable state were universal happi-
ness?
Hardly do I so conceive the outcome of that
power which went
To the making of the worm there in yon clod
its tenement,
Any more than I distinguish aught of that
which, wise and good,
Framed the leaf, its plain of pasture, dropped
the dew, its fineless food.
Nay, were fancy fact, were earth and all it
holds illusion mere,
Only a machine for teaching love and hate
and hope and fear
To myself, the sole existence, single truth
mid falsehood,—well!
If the harsh throes of the prelude die not off
into the swell
Of that perfect piece they sting me to become
a-strain for,—if
Roughness of the long rock-clamber lead not
to the last of cliff,
First of level country where is sward my
pilgrim-foot can prize,—
Plainlier! if this life's conception new life
fail to realize,—
Though earth burst and proved a bubble
glassing hues of hell, one huge
Reflex of the devil's doings—God's work by
no subterfuge—
(So death's kindly touch informed me as it
broke the glamour, gave
Soul and body both release from life's long
nightmare in the grave)
Still,—with no more Nature, no more Man
as riddle to be read,
Only my own joys and sorrows now to reckon
real instead,—
I must say—or choke in silence—"Howso-
ever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise,—life well
weighed,—preponderate."
By necessity ordained thus? I shall bear as
best I can;
By a cause all-good, all-wise, all-potent?
No, as I am man!
Such were God: and was it goodness that
the good within my range
Or had evil in admixture or grew evil's self
by change?
Wisdom—that becoming wise meant making
slow and sure advance
From a knowledge proved in error to acknow-
ledged ignorance?
Power? 'tis just the main assumption reason
most revolts at! power
Unavailing for bestowment on its creature of
an hour,
Man, of so much proper action rightly aimed
and reaching aim,
So much passion,—no defect there, no ex-
cess, but still the same,—
As what constitutes existence, pure perfection
bright as brief
For yon worm, man's fellow-creature, on yon
happier world—its leaf!

No, as I am man, I mourn the poverty I must impute :
Goodness, wisdom, power, all bounded, each a human attribute !

But, O world outspread beneath me ! only for myself I speak,
Nowise dare to play the spokesman for my brothers strong and weak,
Full and empty, wise and foolish, good and bad, in every age,
Every clime, I turn my eyes from, as in one or other stage
Of a torture writhe they, Job-like couched on dung and crazed with blains
—Wherefore ? whereto ? ask the whirlwind what the dread voice thence explains !
I shall "vindicate no way of God's to man," nor stand apart,
"Laugh, be candid !" while I watch it traversing the human heart.
Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on : no less
Mine results in "Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts
Gain about to be. For at what moment did I so advance
Near to knowledge as when frustrate of escape from ignorance ?
Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
Rule, and truth seem more than ever potent because falsehood reigned ?
While for love—Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed
By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed ?
Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup unspilled,
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop distilled,
I shall boast it mine—the balsam, bless each kindly wrench that wrung
From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence pleasure sprung,
Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the berry, left all grace
Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place !

Witness, Dear and True, how little I was 'ware of—not your worth
—That I knew, my heart assures me—but of what a shade on earth
Would the passage from my presence of the tall white figure throw
O'er the ways we walked together ! Somewhat narrow, somewhat slow
Used to seem the ways, the walking : narrow ways are well to tread
When there's moss beneath the footstep, honeysuckle overhead :
Walking slow to beating bosom surest solace soonest gives,
Liberates the brain o'erloaded—best of all restoratives.
Nay, do I forget the open vast where soon or late converged
Ways though winding ?—world-wide heaven-high sea where music slept or surged
As the angel had ascendant, and Beethoven's Titan mace
Smote the immense to storm Mozart would by a finger's lifting chase ?
Yes, I knew—but not with knowledge such as thrills me while I view
Yonder precinct which henceforward holds and hides the Dear and True.
Grant me (once again) assurance we shall each meet each some day,
Walk—but with how bold a footstep ! on a way—but what a way !
—Worst were best, defeat were triumph, utter loss were utmost gain.
Can it be, and must, and will it ?

Silence ! Out of fact's domain,
Just surmise prepared to mutter hope, and also fear—dispute
Fact's inexorable ruling "Outside fact, surmise be mute !"

Well!
Ay, well and best, if fact's self I may force the answer from!
'Tis surmise I stop the mouth of. Not above in yonder dome
All a rapture with its rose-glow,—not around, where pile and peak
Strainingly await the sun's fall,—not beneath, where crickets creak,
Birds assemble for their bed-time, soft the tree-top swell subsides,—
No, nor yet within my deepest sentient self the knowledge hides.
Aspiration, reminiscence, plausibilities of trust
—Now the ready "Man were wronged else," now the rash "and God unjust"—
None of these I need. Take thou, my soul, thy solitary stand,
Umpire to the champions Fancy, Reason, as on either hand
Amicable war they wage and play the foe in thy behoof!
Fancy thrust and Reason parry! Thine the prize who stand aloof.

FANCY.

I concede the thing refused: henceforth no certainty more plain
Than this mere surmise that after body dies soul lives again.
Two, the only facts acknowledged late, are now increased to three—
God is, and the soul is, and, as certain, after death shall be.
Put this third to use in life, the time for using fact!

REASON.

I do:
Find it promises advantage, coupled with the other two.
Life to come will be improvement on the life that's now; destroy
Body's thwartings, there's no longer screen betwixt soul and soul's joy.
Why should we expect new hindrance, novel tether? In this first
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at worst:
Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde.
We know more though we know little, we grow stronger though still weak,
Partly see though all too purblind, stammer though we cannot speak.
There is no such grudge in God as scared the ancient Greek, no fresh
Substitute of trap for dragnet, once a breakage in the mesh.
Dragons were, and serpents are, and blindworms will be: ne'er emerged
Any new-created python for man's plague since earth was purged.
Failing proof, then, of invented trouble to replace the old,
O'er this life the next presents advantage much and manifold:
Which advantage—in the absence of a fourth and farther fact
Now conceivably surmised, of harm to follow from the act—
I pronounce for man's obtaining at this moment. Why delay?
Is he happy? happiness will change: anticipate the day!
Is he sad? there's ready refuge: of all sadness death's prompt cure!
Is he both, in mingled measure? cease a burthen to endure!
Pains with sorry compensations, pleasures stinted in the dole,
Power that sinks and pettiness that soars, all halved and nothing whole,
Idle hopes that lure man onward, forced back by as idle fears—
What a load he stumbles under through his glad sad seventy years,
When a touch sets right the turmoil, lifts his spirit where, flesh-freed,
Knowledge shall be rightly named so, all that seems be truth indeed!

Grant his forces no accession, nay, no faculty's increase,
Only let what now exists continue, let him prove in peace
Power whereof the interrupted unperfected play enticed
Man through darkness, which to lighten any spark of hope sufficed,—
What shall then deter his dying out of darkness into light?
Death itself perchance, brief pain that's pang, condensed and infinite?
But at worst, he needs must brave it one day, while, at best, he laughs—
Drops a drop within his chalice, sleep not death his science quaffs!
Any moment claims more courage when, by crossing cold and gloom,
Manfully man quits discomfort, makes for the provided room
Where the old friends want their fellow, where the new acquaintance wait,
Probably for talk assembled, possibly to sup in state!
I affirm and re-affirm it therefore: only make as plain
As that man now lives, that, after dying, man will live again,—
Make as plain the absence, also, of a law to contravene
Voluntary passage from this life to that by change of scene,—
And I bid him—at suspicion of first cloud athwart his sky,
Flower's departure, frost's arrival—never hesitate, but die!

FANCY.

Then I double my concession: grant, along with new life sure,
This same law found lacking now: ordain that, whether rich or poor
Present life is judged in aught man counts advantage—be it hope,
Be it fear that brightens, blackens most or least his horoscope,—
He, by absolute compulsion such as made him live at all,
Go on living to the fated end of life whate'er befall.
What though, as on earth he darkling grovels, man descry the sphere,
Next life's—call it, heaven of freedom, close above and crystal-clear?
He shall find—say, hell to punish who in aught curtails the term,
Fain would act the butterfly before he has played out the worm.
God, soul, earth, heaven, hell,—five facts now: what is to desiderate?

REASON.

Nothing! Henceforth man's existence bows to the monition "Wait!
Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme concern!
Living here means nescience simply: 'tis next life that helps to learn.
Shut those eyes, next life will open,—stop those ears, next life will teach
Hearing's office,—close those lips, next life will give the power of speech!
Or, if action more amuse thee than the passive attitude,
Bravely bustle through thy being, busy thee for ill or good,
Reap this life's success or failure! Soon shall things be unperplexed
And the right and wrong, now tangled, lie unravelled in the next."

FANCY.

Not so fast! Still more concession! not alone do I declare
Life must needs be borne,—I also will that man become aware
Life has worth incalculable, every moment that he spends
So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life depends.
Good, done here, be there rewarded,—evil, worked here, there amerced!
Six facts now, and all established, plain to man the last as first.

REASON.

There was good and evil, then, defined to man by this decree?
Was—for at its promulgation both alike have ceased to be.
Prior to this last announcement "Certainly as God exists,
As He made man's soul, as soul is quenchless by the deathly mists,
Yet is, all the same, forbidden premature escape from time
To eternity's provided purer air and brighter clime,—
Just so certainly depends it on the use to which man turns
Earth, the good or evil done there, whether after death he earns
Life eternal,—heaven, the phrase be, or eternal death,—say, hell.
As his deeds, so proves his portion, doing ill or doing well!"
—Prior to this last announcement, earth was man's probation-place:
Liberty of doing evil gave his doing good a grace;
Once lay down the law, with Nature's simple "Such effects succeed
Causes such, and heaven or hell depends upon man's earthly deed
Just as surely as depends the straight or else the crooked line
On his making point meet point or with or else without incline,"—
Thenceforth neither good nor evil does man, doing what he must.
Lay but down that law as stringent "Wouldst thou live again, be just!"
As this other "Wouldst thou live now, regularly draw thy breath!
For, suspend the operation, straight law's breach results in death—"
And (provided always, man, addressed this mode, be sound and sane)
Prompt and absolute obedience, never doubt, will law obtain!
Tell not me "Look round us! nothing each side but acknowledged law,
Now styled God's—now, Nature's edict!"
Where's obedience without flaw
Paid to either? What's the adage rife in man's mouth? Why, "The best
I both see and praise, the worst I follow"—which, despite professed
Seeing, praising, all the same he follows, since he disbelieves
In the heart of him that edict which for truth his head receives.
There's evading and persuading and much making law amends
Somehow, there's the nice distinction 'twixt fast foes and faulty friends,
—Any consequence except inevitable death when "Die,
Whoso breaks our law!" they publish, God and Nature equally.
Law that's kept or broken—subject to man's will and pleasure! Whence?
How comes law to bear eluding? Not because of impotence:
Certain laws exist already which to hear means to obey;
Therefore not without a purpose these man must, while those man may
Keep and, for the keeping, haply gain approval and reward.
Break through this last superstructure, all is empty air—no sward
Firm like my first fact to stand on "God there is, and soul there is,"
And soul's earthly life-allotment: wherein, by hypothesis,
Soul is bound to pass probation, prove its powers, and exercise
Sense and thought on fact, and then, from fact educing fit surmise,
Ask itself, and of itself have solely answer, "Does the scope
Earth affords of fact to judge by warrant future fear or hope?"

Thus have we come back full circle: fancy's footsteps one by one
Go their round conducting reason to the point where they begun,

Left where we were left so lately, Dear and
True! When, half a week
Since, we walked and talked and thus I told
you, how suffused a cheek
You had turned me had I sudden brought
the blush into the smile
By some word like "Idly argued! you know
better all the while!"
Now, from me—Oh not a blush but, how
much more, a joyous glow,
Laugh triumphant, would it strike did your
"Yes, better I do know"
Break, my warrant for assurance! which
assurance may not be
It, supplanting hope, assurance needs must
change this life to me.
So, I hope—no more than hope, but hope—
no less than hope, because
I can fathom, by no plumb-line sunk in life's
apparent laws,
How I may in any instance fix where change
should meetly fall
Nor involve, by one revisal, abrogation of
them all:
—Which again involves as utter change in
life thus law-released,
Whence the good of goodness vanished when
the ill of evil ceased.
Whereas, life and laws apparent re-instated,
—all we know,
All we know not,—o'er our heaven again
cloud closes, until, lo—
Hope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to
pierce its gloom, compelled
By a power and by a purpose which, if no
one else beheld,
I behold in life, so—hope!

Sad summing-up of all to say!
Athanasius contra mundum, why should he
hope more than they?
So are men made notwithstanding, such mag-
netic virtue darts
From each head their fancy haloes to their
unresisting hearts!

Here I stand, methinks a stone's throw from
yon village I this morn
Traversed for the sake of looking one last look
at its forlorn
Tenement's ignoble fortune: through a cre-
vice, plain its floor
Piled with provender for cattle, while a dung-
heap blocked the door.
In that squalid Bossex, under that obscene
red roof, arose,
Like a fiery flying serpent from its egg, a soul
—Rousseau's.
Turn thence! Is it Diodati joins the glimmer
of the lake?
There I plucked a leaf, one week
since, — ivy, plucked for Byron's
sake.
Famed unfortunates! And yet, because of
that phosphoric fame
Swathing blackness' self with brightness till
putridity looked flame,
All the world was witched: and where-
fore? what could lie beneath,
allure
Heart of man to let corruption serve man's
head as cynosure?
Was the magic in the dictum "All that's
good is gone and past;
Bad and worse still grows the present, and
the worst of all comes last:
Which believe—for I believe it?" So
preached one his gospel-news;
While melodious moaned the other "Dying
day with dolphin-hues!
Storm, for loveliness and darkness like a
woman's eye! Ye mounts
Where I climb to 'scape my fellow, and thou
sea wherein he counts
Not one inch of vile dominion! What were
your especial worth
Failed ye to enforce the maxim 'Of all objects
found on earth
Man is meanest, much too honoured when
compared with—what by odds
Beats him—any dog: so, let him go a-howling
to his gods!'
Which believe—for I believe it!" such the
comfort man received
Sadly since perforce he must: for why? the
famous bard believed!

Fame! Then, give me fame, a moment! As
I gather at a glance
Human glory after glory vivifying yon expanse,
Let me grasp them all together, hold on high
and brandish well
Beacon-like above the rapt world ready,
whether heaven or hell
Send the dazzling summons earthward, to
submit itself the same,
Take on trust the hope or else despair flashed
full on face by—Fame!
Thanks, thou pine-tree of Makistos, wide thy
giant torch I wave!
Know ye whence I plucked the pillar, late
with sky for architrave?
This the trunk, the central solid Knowledge,
kindled core, began
Tugging earth-deeps, trying heaven-heights,
rooted yonder at Lausanne.
This which flits and spits, the aspic,—
sparkles in and out the boughs
Now, and now condensed, the python, coil-
ing round and round allows
Scarce the bole its due effulgence, dulled by
flake on flake of Wit—
Laughter so bejewels Learning,—what but
Ferney nourished it?
Nay, nor fear—since every resin feeds the
flame—that I dispense
With yon Bossex terebinth-tree's all-explosive
Eloquence:
No, be sure! nor, any more than thy resplen-
dency, Jean-Jacques,
Dare I want thine, Diodati! What though
monkeys and macaques
Gibber "Byron"? Byron's ivy rears a branch
beyond the crew,
Green for ever, no deciduous trash macaques
and monkeys chew!
As Rousseau, then, eloquent, as Byron prime
in poet's power,—
Detonations, fulgurations, smiles—the rain-
bow, tears—the shower,—
Lo, I lift the coruscating marvel—Fame!
and, famed, declare
—Learned for the nonce as Gibbon, witty as
wit's self Voltaire . . .
O the sorriest of conclusions to whatever man
of sense
Mid the millions stands the unit, takes no
flare for evidence!
Yet the millions have their portion, live their
calm or troublous day,
Find significance in fireworks: so, by help of
mine, they may
Confidently lay to heart and lock in head
their life long—this:
"He there with the brand flamboyant, broad
o'er night's forlorn abyss,
Crowned by prose and verse; and wield-
ing, with Wit's bauble, Learning's
rod . . .
Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul,
was very sure of God.

So the poor smile played, that evening: pallid
smile long since extinct
Here in London's mid-November! Not so
loosely thoughts were linked,
Six weeks since as I, descending in the sunset
from Salève,
Found the chain, I seemed to forge there,
flawless till it reached your grave,—
Not so filmy was the texture, but I bore it in
my breast
Safe thus far. And since I found a some-
thing in me would not rest
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of
the chain,
—Here it lies, for much or little! I have
lived all o'er again
That last pregnant hour: I saved it, just as I
could save a root
Disinterred for re-interment when the time
best helps to shoot.
Life is stocked with germs of torpid life; but
may I never wake
Those of mine whose resurrection could not
be without earthquake!
Rest all such, unraised forever! Be this,
sad yet sweet, the sole
Memory evoked from slumber! Least part
this: then what the whole?

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

1878.

[Poet Number One is *René Gentilhomme*, page to the Prince of Condé, whose chance of succession to the French throne was spoilt by Anne of Austria giving birth to a dauphin. The poem partly turns on this incident. Poet Number Two is *Maillard*, who managed to make Voltaire look foolish in the circumstances narrated in this poem.]

I.

Such a starved bank of moss
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

II.

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud
Splendid, a star!

III.

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

I.

"Fame!" Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was,—how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendidest—a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II.

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed!
Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed
Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,
As redly up and out and off they reeled
Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III.

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used,—
You now, in childish days or rather nights,—
As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
By that old nurse-taught game which gave the sprites
Each one his title and career,—confused
Belief 'twas all long over with the flights
From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV.

New long bright life! and happy chance befell—
That I know—when some prematurely lost
Child of disaster bore away the bell
From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
Never before my chimney broke the spell!
Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost,
While—never mind Who was it cumbered earth—
Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V.

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with—ask the chloride's name
From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass
Its life, I thought was fed on copperas.

VI.

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
The style and prowess of that purple one?
Who is the hero other eyes shall see
Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun—
Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
O' the coal,—as Job and Hebrew name a spark,—
What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII.

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours
The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent powers
Constellate proudly,—swords, scrolls, harps, that fill
The vulgar eye to surfeit,—found best flowers
Hid deepest in the dark,—named unplucked grace
Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII.

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
Oh and I bid thee,—to whom fortune doled
Scantly all other gifts out—bicker blue,
Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.

IX.

No! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere
Stripling's amusement: manhood's sport be grave!
Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,
Their boldness and their brightness could not save
(In some old night of time on some lone drear
Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave)
—Save from ignoble exit into smoke,
Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke!

X.

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift
In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,
We both know well! Where uncouth tribes made shift
Long since to just keep life in, billows dash
Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift
Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash
Though they have built the serviceable town
Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI.

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub
To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts
Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub
The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts
Their promontory's breadth with salt: all stub
Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife
To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII.

And what life! Here was, from the world to choose,
The Druids' chosen chief of homes: they reared
—Only their women,—mid the slush and ooze
Of yon low islet,—to their sun, revered
In strange stone guise,—a temple. May-dawn dews
Saw the old structure levelled; when there peered
May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more
Up towered the new pile perfect as before:

XIII.

Seeing that priestesses—and all were such—
Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,
Each alike helping—well, if not too much!
For, mid their eagerness to outstrip day
And get work done, if any loosed her clutch
And let a single stone drop, straight a prey
Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,
By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

XIV.

And still so much remains of that grey cult,
That even now, of nights, do women steal
To the sole Menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic church-spire by appeal
To power discrowned in vain, since each adult
Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal
Whatever plague no priestly help can cure:
Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure!

XV.

Nay more: on May-morns, that primeval rite
Of temple-building, with its punishment
For rash precipitation, lingers, spite
Of all remonstrance; vainly are they shent,
Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,
Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent:
Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs
From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs.

XVI.

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door
Sing unintelligible words to tunes
As obsolete: "scraps of Druidic lore,"
Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes
Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.
Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes!
They serve my purpose, which is but to show
Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII.

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there
By fancy from the log that ends its days
Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,
On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze
We two crouch round so closely, bidding care
Keep outside with the snow-storm? Something says
"Fit time for story-telling!" I begin—
Why not at Croisic, port we first put in?

XVIII.

Anywhere serves: for point me out the place
Wherever man has made himself a home,
And there I find the story of our race
In little, just at Croisic as at Rome.
What matters the degree? the kind I trace.
Druids their temple, Christians have their dome:
So with mankind; and Croisic, I'll engage,
With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX.

No doubt, men vastly differ: and we need
Some strange exceptional benevolence
Of nature's sunshine to develop seed
So well, in the less-favoured clime, that thence
We may discern how shrub means tree indeed
Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.
Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks
With beasts or gods: stove-forced, give warmth the thanks!

XX.

While, is there any ice-checked? Such shall learn
I am thankworthy, who propose to slake
His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn
Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake
No memories of what is harsh and stern
In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake
The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps
Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps.

XXI.

Take these two, see, each outbreak,—spirt and spirt
Of fire from our brave billet's either edge
Which—call maternal Croisic ocean-girt!
These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.
One flames fierce gules, its feebler rival—vert,
Heralds would tell you: heroes, I allege,
They both were: soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,
Lawyers, physicians—guess what gods or beasts!

XXII.

None of them all, but—poets, if you please!
"What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,
Did two among the aborigines
Of that rough region pass the ungracious time
Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,
The songs forbidden a serener clime?
Or had they universal audience—that's
To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz?"

XXIII.

Open your ears! Each poet in his day
Had such a mighty moment of success
As pinnacled him straight, in full display,
For the whole world to worship—nothing less!
Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray?
And did not Paris, for one moment—yes,
Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,
One at a time, a century between?

XXIV.

And yet you never heard their names! Assist,
Clio, Historic Muse, while I record
Great deeds! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist
And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord
Of day, one moment! Hear the annalist
Tell a strange story, true to the least word!
At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten
Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV.

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme
—Appropriate appellation! noble birth
And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom
Was "Better do than say"! In Croisic's dearth
Why prison his career while Christendom
Lay open to reward acknowledged worth?
He therefore left it at the proper age
And got to be the Prince of Condé's page.

XXVI.

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called "The Duke,"
—Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,
(As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,
Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,
Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could look
For issue)—failing Louis of so rare
A godsend, it was natural the Prince
Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor wince.

XXVII.

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth
Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump almost
To bursting,—would the brothers, childless both,
Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost—
Condé, called "Duke" and "Next King," nothing loth
Awaited his appointment to the post,
And wiled away the time, as best he might,
Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII.

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn
From cities where a whisper breeds offence,
He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn
Testify to first stir of Providence;
And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,
There wanted not a poet to dispense
Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,
Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX.

A poet born and bred, his very sire
A poet also, author of a piece
Printed and published, "Ladies — their attire":
Therefore the son, just born at his decease,
Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,
And kept it, yielding moderate increase
Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much
Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

XXX.

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind!)
Rubbish not wholly without value, though,
Being to compliment the Duke designed
And bring the complimenter credit so,—
Pleasure with profit happily combined.
Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till—lo,
This happened, as he sat in an alcove
Elaborating rhyme for "love"—*not* "dove."

XXXI.

He was alone: silence and solitude
Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,
Nature—not our new picturesque and rude,
But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground—
Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued
With these, he sat absorbed in one profound
Excogitation "Were it best to hint
Or boldly boast 'She loves me,—Araminte'?"

XXXII.

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight
Almost, so close to eyes; then, quick on flash,
Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright
Where René sat a-rhyming: with huge crash
Of marble into atoms infinite—
Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash
The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place:
One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

XXXIII.

So, when the horrible confusion loosed
Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,
Seeing and hearing by degrees induced
Conviction what he felt was life, not death—
His fluttered faculties came back to roost
One after one, as fowls do: ay, beneath,
About his very feet there, lay in dust
Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

XXXIV.

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing
But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,
A ducal crown—which meant "Now Duke: Next, King"?
Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes
Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling
Prostrates a giant; so can pulverize
Marble pretension—how much more, make moult
A peacock-prince his plume—God's thunder-bolt.

XXXV.

That was enough for René, that first fact
Thus flashed into him. Up he looked: all blue
And bright the sky above; earth firm, compact
Beneath his footing, lay apparent too;
Opposite stood the pillar: nothing lacked
There, but the Duke's crown: see, its fragments strew
The earth,—about his feet lie atoms fine
Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line!

XXXVI.

So, for the moment, all the universe
Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him,—
Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,
Of one and the same value,—to the brim
Flooded with truth for better or for worse,—
He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,
Keeping its place on table: not a dint
Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII.

And over the neat crowquill calligraph
His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox
Tramples a flower-bed in a garden,—laugh
You may!—so does not he, whose quick heart knocks
Audibly at his breast: an epitaph
On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,
He might be penning in a wild dismay,
Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII.

And what is it so terribly he pens,
Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,
Hearts, darts," and all his day's *divinior mens*
Judged necessary to a perfect style?
Little recks René, with a breast to cleanse,
Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile:
Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince
(Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt—the Prince.

XXXIX.

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not more
To life's end! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be?
Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before
Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,
Take its proud station there! Let France adore
No longer an illusive mock-sun—thee—
But keep her homage for Sol's self, about
To rise and put pretenders to the rout!

XL.

"What? France so God-abandoned that her root
Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,
Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot
Greenly as ever? Nature, though benign,
Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.
In store for such is punishment condign:
Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,
So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world!"

XLI.

Which penned—some forty lines to this effect—
Our René folds his paper, marches brave
Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,
Triumphant, an emancipated slave.
There stands the Prince. "How now? My Duke's crown wrecked?
What may this mean?" The answer René gave
Was—handing him the verses, with the due
Incline of body: "Sir, God's word to you!"

XLII.

The Prince read, paled, was silent; all around,
The courtier-company, to whom he passed
The paper, read, in equal silence bound.
René grew also by degrees aghast
At his own fit of courage—palely found
Way of retreat from that pale presence: classed
Once more among the cony-kind. "Oh, son,
It is a feeble folk!" saith Solomon.

XLIII.

Vainly he apprehended evil: since,
When, at the year's end, even as foretold,
Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince
Of that long-craved mere visionary gold,
'Twas no fit time for envy to evince
Malice, be sure! The timidest grew bold:
Of all that courtier-company not one
But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV.

And all sorts and conditions that stood by
At René's burning moment, bright escape
Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.
Which witness took the customary shape
Of verse; a score of poets in full cry
Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,
Soon Paris caught the infection; gaining strength,
How could it fail to reach the Court at length?

XLV.

"O poet!" smiled King Louis, "and besides,
O prophet! Sure, by miracle announced,
My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides
Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be trounced
For irreligion: since the fool derides
Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced
Exactly on the moment I should lift
Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, 'God's gift!'

XLVI.

"So call the boy! and call this bard and seer
By a new title! him I raise to rank
Of 'Royal Poet:' poet without peer!
Whose fellows only have themselves to thank
If humbly they must follow in the rear
My René. He's the master: they must clank
Their chains of song, confessed his slaves; for why?
They poetize, while he can prophesy!"

XLVII.

So said, so done; our René rose august,
"The Royal Poet;" straightway put in type
His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just
Procedure) added,—now that time was ripe
For proving friends did well his word to trust,—
Those attestations, turned to lyre or pipe,
Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell
The Dauphin's birth: friends trusted, and did well.

XLVIII.

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,
Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed
The portrait to his book: a crown of bay
Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed;
And Latin verses, lovely in their way,
Described him as "the biforked hill betwixt:
Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,
Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump."

XLIX.

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus long
—The red fire? That's the reason must excuse
My letting flicker René's prophet-song
No longer; for its pertinacious hues
Must fade before its fellow joins the throng
Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues
To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,
Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks!

L.

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,
Fury of favour, Royal Poetship,
Prophetship, book, verse, picture—thereof came
—Nothing! That's why I would not let outstrip
Red his green rival flamelet: just the same
Ending in smoke waits both! In vain we rip
The past, no further faintest trace remains
Of René to reward our pious pains.

LI.

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed
At Croisic. "Who may be this glorified
Mortal unheard-of hitherto?" amazed
That person asked the owner by his side,
Who proved as ignorant. The question raised
Provoked inquiry; key by key was tried
On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew
The wards at one key's touch, which key was —Who?

LII.

The other famous poet! Wait thy turn,
Thou green, our red's competitor! Enough
Just now to note 'twas he that itched to learn
(A hundred years ago) how fate could puff
Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn
To suds so big a bubble in some huff:
Since green too found red's portrait,—having heard
Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII.

And he with zeal addressed him to the task
Of hunting out, by all and any means,
—Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask
Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens
And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask!
Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens
The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips
Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV.

After a vast expenditure of pains,
Our second poet found the prize he sought:
Urged in his search by something that restrains
From undue triumph famed ones who have fought,
Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains:
Something that tells such—dear is triumph bought
If it means only basking in the midst
Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV.

For, what did searching find at last but this?
Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem
To think I heard one old De Chevaye is
Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam
Of light from out the dark proved not amiss
To track, by correspondence on the theme;
And soon the twilight broadened into day,
For thus to question answered De Chevaye.

LVI.

"True it is, I did once possess the works
You want account of—works—to call them so,—
Comprised in one small book: the volume lurks
(Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)
'Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks
Still to remember, because long ago
That and my other rare shelf-occupants
Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII.

"Yet of that book one strange particular
Still stays in mind with me"—and thereupon
Followed the story. "Few the poems are;
The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,
And sundry witnesses from near and far
That here at least was prophesying done
By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,
Before the thing he prophesied about."

LVIII.

That's all he knew, and all the poet learned,
And all that you and I are like to hear
Of René; since not only book is burned
But memory extinguished,—nay, I fear,
Portrait is gone too: nowhere I discerned
A trace of it at Croisic. "Must a tear
Needs fall for that?" you smile. "How fortune fares
With such a mediocrity, who cares?"

LIX.

Well, I care—intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt
In after-life, who bore the burden grave
Of certainly believing God had dealt
For once directly with him: did not rave
—A maniac, did not find his reason melt
—An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX.

How many problems that one fact would solve!
An ordinary soul, no more, no less,
About whose life earth's common sights revolve,
On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,
This fact—God tasks him, and will not absolve
Task's negligent performer! Can you guess
How such a soul,—the task performed to point,—
Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint?

LXI.

Does he stand stock-like henceforth? or proceed
Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,
Down-trampling vulgar hindrance?—as the reed
Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind will
Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it speed
Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil
Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice
Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice.

LXII.

I think no such direct plain truth consists
With actual sense and thought and what they take
To be the solid walls of life: mere mists—
How such would, at that truth's first piercing, break
Into the nullity they are!—slight lists
Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake
Of some mock-mistress, mimic war: laid low
At trumpet-blast, there's shown the world, one foe!

LXIII.

No, we must play the pageant out, observe
The tourney-regulations, and regard
Success—to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,
Failure—to break no bones yet fall on sward;
Must prove we have—not courage? well then, —nerve!
And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award—
Be warranted as promising to wield
Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV.

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps
Which tell us counterfeited truths—these same
Are—sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?
—Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim
That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,
To fall effectless from the soul it came
As if to fix its own, but simply smote
And startled to vague beauty more remote?

LXV.

So do we gain enough—yet not too much—
Acquaintance with that outer element
Wherein there's operation (call it such!)
Quite of another kind than we the pent
On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch
Lights up at the least chink: let roof be rent—
How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,
Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm!

LXVI.

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick
Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare
Into oblivion was impolitic?
No doubt his soul became at once aware
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick
Is poor employment: human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII.

There's our first famous poet. Step thou forth
Second consummate songster! See, the tongue
Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth
In yellow, purple mixed its green among,

No pure and simple resin from the North,
But composite with virtues that belong
To Southern culture! Love not more than hate
Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII.

Prepare to witness a combustion rich
And riotously splendid, far beyond
Poor René's lambent little streamer which
Only played candle to a Court grown fond
By baby-birth: this soared to such a pitch,
Alternately such colours doffed and donned,
That when I say it dazzled Paris—please
Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees!

LXIX.

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,
Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,
Whose birth that century ended which began
By similar bestowment on our earth
Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan
The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth—
Not Paris in its plenitude—suffice
To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX.

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein
Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirts:
In verses of society had lain
His talent chiefly; but the Muse asserts
Privilege most by treating with disdain
Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts
Spasmodically forth. Have people time
And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme?

LXXI.

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch
Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell
Of admiration: welded lines with clinch
Of ending word and word, to every belle
In Croisic's bounds; these, brisk as any finch,
He twittered till his fame had reached as well
Guérande as Batz; but there fame stopped, for—curse
On fortune—outside lay the universe!

LXXII.

That's Paris. Well,—why not break bounds, and send
Song onward till it echo at the gates
Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,
And end too, seeing that success there sates
The soul which hungers most for fame? Why spend
A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's
Decree, there happens to be just the prize
Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize?

LXXIII.

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self
Proposes to what bard shall best indite
A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,
The Art of Navigation, steered aright,
Has, in our last king's reign,—the lucky elf,—
Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,
And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees
The subject's crowd of capabilities!

LXXIV.

Neptune and Amphitrité! Thetis, who
Is either Tethys or as good—both tag!
Triton can shove along a vessel too:
It's Virgil! Then the winds that blow or lag,—
De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois! Toulouse blew
Longest, we reckon: he must puff the flag
To fullest outflare; while our lacking nymph
Be Anne of Austria, Regent o'er the lymph!

LXXV.

Promised, performed! Since *irritabilis gens*
Holds of the feverish impotence that strives
To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's
Scratching itself on paper; placid lives,
Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens*:
Bees brood above the honey in their hives;
Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl,—
Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul!

LXXVI.

To Paris with the product! This despatched,
One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure
Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched
Away perforce the itch that knows no cure
But daily paper-friction: more than matched
His first feat by a second—tribute pure
And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice
Should peal with one accord "Be Paul our choice!"

LXXVII.

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane
And sound Tribunal, delegates august
Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train—
Whom every poetaster tries to thrust
From where, high-throned, they dominate the Seine:
Fruitless endeavour,—fail it shall and must!
Whereof in witness have not one and all
The Forty voices pealed "Our Choice be Paul"?

LXXVIII.

Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack
For human expectation! Scarcely ink
Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back
Rejected, shamed! Some other poet's clink
"Thetis and Tethys" had seduced the pack
Of pedants to declare perfection's pink
A singularly poor production. "Whew!
The Forty are stark fools, I always knew."

LXXIX.

First fury over (for Paul's race—to-wit,
Brain-vibrios—wriggle clear of protoplasm
Into minute life that's one fury-fit),
"These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm
Comports with what should counterbalance it—
Some knowledge of the world! No doubt, orgasm
Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands
Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands!

LXXX.

"Verse must be cared for at this early stage,
Handled, nay dandled even. I should play
Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,
I meekly let these dotards frown away
My bantling from the rightful heritage
Of smiles and kisses! Let the public say
If it be worthy praises or rebukes,
My poem, from these Forty old perukes!"

LXXXI.

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace
With no less than the Chevalier La Roque,—
Eminent in those days for pride of place,
Seeing he had it in his power to block
The way or smooth the road to all the race
Of literators trudging up to knock
At Fame's exalted temple-door—for why?
He edited the Paris "Mercury":—

LXXXII.

By this friend's help the Chevalier receives
Paul's poem, prefaced by the due appeal
To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves
A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal
With case so customary—turns the leaves,
Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal—
Then brightens up the critic's brow deep-lined.
"The thing may be so cleverly declined!"

LXXXIII.

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,
Dip and indite! "Sir, gratitude immense
For this true draught from the Pierian rill!
Our Academic clodpoles must be dense
Indeed to stand unirrigated still.
No less, we critics dare not give offence
To grandees like the Forty: while we mock
We grin and bear. So, here's your piece! La Roque."

LXXXIV.

"There now!" cries Paul: "the fellow can't avoid
Confessing that my piece deserves the palm;
And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed
By every scribbler he permits embalm
His crambo in the Journal's corner! Cloyed
With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm
Be caused by verse like mine: though that's no cause
For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV.

"Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon?
First let him fear *me!* Change smooth speech to rough!
I'll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon
Who is the foe to dread: insist enough
On my own merits till, as clear as noon,
He sees I am no man to take rebuff
As patiently as scribblers may and must!
Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust!"

LXXXVI.

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings
Its challenge in the critic's face. Alack!
Our bard mistakes his man! The gauntlet rings
On brazen visor proof against attack.
Prompt from his editorial throne up springs
The insulted magnate, and his mace falls, thwack,
On Paul's devoted brainpan,—quite away
From common courtesies of fencing-play!

LXXXVII.

"Sir, will you have the truth? This piece of yours
Is simply execrable past belief.
I shrank from saying so; but, since nought cures
Conceit but truth, truth's at your service! Brief,
Just so long as 'The Mercury' endures,
So long are you excluded by its Chief
From corner, nay, from cranny! Play the cock
O' the roost, henceforth, at Croisic!" wrote La Roque.

LXXXVIII.

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red
Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme
Was merely foolish, faulty in the head
Not heart of him: conceit's a venial crime.
"Oh by no means malicious!" cousins said:
Fussily feeble,—harmless all the time,
Piddling at so-called satire—well-advised,
He held in most awe whom he satirized.

LXXXIX.

Accordingly his kith and kin—removed
From emulation of the poet's gift
By power and will—these rather liked, nay, loved
The man who gave his family a lift
Out of the Croisic level; "disapproved
Satire so trenchant." Thus our poet sniffed
Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock
"The Mercury's" box of ointment was La Roque.

XC.

But when Paul's visage grew from red to white,
And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell
Of who was to be kicked,—"And serve him right"—
A gay voice interposed—"did kicking well
Answer the purpose! Only—if I might
Suggest as much—a far more potent spell
Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,
Women are ready at resource, you know!

XCI.

"Talent should minister to genius! Good:
The proper and superior smile returns.
Hear me with patience! Have you understood
The only method whereby genius earns
Fit guerdon nowadays? In knightly mood
You entered lists with visor up; one learns
Too late that, had you mounted Roland's crest,
'Room!' they had roared—La Roque with all the rest!

XCII.

"Why did you first of all transmit your piece
To those same priggish Forty unprepared
Whether to rank you with the swans or geese
By friendly intervention? If they dared
Count you a cackler,—wonders never cease!
I think it still more wondrous that you bared
Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise
Were gained by simple fighting nowadays!

XCIII.

"Your next step showed a touch of the true means
Whereby desert is crowned: not force but wile
Came to the rescue. 'Get behind the scenes!'
Your friend advised: he writes, sets forth your style
And title, to such purpose intervenes
That you get velvet-compliment three-pile;
And, though 'The Mercury' said 'nay,' nor stock
Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

XCIV.

"Why must you needs revert to the high hand,
Imperative procedure—what you call
'Taking on merit your exclusive stand'?
Stand, with a vengeance! Soon you went to wall,
You and your merit! Only fools command
When folk are free to disobey them, Paul!
You've learnt your lesson, found out what's o'clock,
By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

XCV.

"Now let me counsel! Lay this piece on shelf
—Masterpiece though it be! From out your desk
Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque
Presiding o'er the Navy! I myself
Hand-write what's legible yet picturesque;
I'll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts La Roque!

XCVI.

"Deïdamia he—Achilles thou!
Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt!
My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow
In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped
I see the walls which stand so stoutly now!
I see the toils about the game entrapped
By honest cunning! Chains of lady's-smock,
Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque!"

XCVII.

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch
That laughed above Paul's shoulder as it heaved
With the indignant heart?—bade steal a march
And not continue charging? Who conceived
This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch
On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,
From arm-chair moodiness to escritoire
Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir?

XCVIII.

Who but Paul's sister! named of course like him
"Desforges"; but, mark you, in those days a queer
Custom obtained,—who knows whence grew the whim?—
That people could not read their title clear
To reverence till their own true names, made dim
By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,
Replaced by brand-new bright ones: Arouet,
For instance, grew Voltaire; Desforges—Malcrais.

XCIX.

"Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne"—because
The family possessed at Brederac
A vineyard,—few grapes, many hips-and-haws,—
Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back
Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,
So did her sprightly nature nowise lack

Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,
In "Malcrais de la Vigne"—more short,
"Malcrais."

C.

Out from Paul's escritoire behold escape
The hoarded treasure! verse falls thick and fast,
Sonnets and songs of every size and shape.
The lady ponders on her prize; at last
Selects one which — Oh angel and yet ape!—
Her malice thinks is probably surpassed
In badness by no fellow of the flock,
Copies it fair, and "Now for my La Roque!"

CI.

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,
The soft petitionary letter. "Grant
A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt
She soar her little circuit, habitant
Of an old manor; buried in which crypt,
How can the youthful châtelaine but pant
For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*
Appointed 'Mercury's' Editor, La Roque?"

CII.

'Twas an epistle that might move the Turk!
More certainly it moved our middle-aged
Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,
Raked the old ashes up and disengaged
The sparks of gallantry which always lurk
Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged
In no degree by compliments on style;
Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?

CIII.

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place
Of honour in the gratified Gazette,
With due acknowledgment of power and grace;
Prognostication, too, that higher yet
The Breton Muse will soar: fresh youth, high race,
Beauty and wealth have amicably met
That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair
Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

CIV.

"There!" cried the lively lady. "Who was right—
You in the dumps, or I the merry maid
Who know a trick or two can baffle spite
Tenfold the force of this old fool's? Afraid
Of Editor La Roque? But come! next flight
Shall outsoar—Deshoulières alone? My blade,
Sappho herself shall you confess outstript!
Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript!"

CV.

And so, once well a-foot, advanced the game:
More and more verses, corresponding gush
On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim
Rose to the pitch of uproar. "Sappho? Tush!
Sure 'Malcrais on her Parrot' puts to shame
Deshoulières' pastoral, clay not worth a rush
Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock,
Unearthed in Brittany,—nay, ask La Roque!"

CVI.

Such was the Paris tribute. "Yes," you sneer,
"Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage
Resist contagious folly, never fear!"
Do they? Permit me to detach one page
From the huge Album which from far and near
Poetic praises blackened in a rage
Of rapture! and that page shall be—who stares
Confounded now, I ask you?—just Voltaire's!

CVII.

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed
To death Imposture through the armour-joints!
How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed
Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out? Fate appoints
That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed
Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,
Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,
And dismalest of tumbles proved—Voltaire's!

CVIII.

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith
"Henri" in verse and "Charles" in prose he sent
To do her suit and service! Here's the pith
Of half a dozen stanzas—stones which went
To build that simulated monolith—
Sham love in due degree with homage blent
As sham—which in the vast of volumes scares
The traveller still: "That stucco-heap—Voltaire's?"

CIX.

"Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown
The wilds to startle Paris that's one ear!
Thou who such strange capacity hast shown
For joining all that's grand with all that's dear,
Knowledge with power to please—Deshoulières grown
Learned as Dacier in thy person! mere
Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine
I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine!

CX.

"Charles was my taskwork only; Henri trod
My hero erst; and now, my heroine—she
Shall be thyself! True—is it true, great God?
Certainly love henceforward must not be!
Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail—how odd!—
Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me!
There's no replacing love with these, alas!
Yet all I can I do to prove no ass.

CXI.

"I labour to amuse my freedom; but
Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,
And—borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut!—
Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,
Soon should I see myself in prison shut
With all imaginable pleasure." Reach
The washhand-basin for admirers! There's
A stomach-moving tribute—and Voltaire's!

CXII.

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,
Adulatory flourish, not worth frown!
What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux?
These in their Dictionary have her down
Under the heading "Author": "Malcrais, too,
Is 'Author' of much verse that claims renown."
While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why proceed?
Enough of this—something too much, indeed!

CXIII.

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left
Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds
Of figurative passion; hilt and heft,
Plunged his huge downright love through what surrounds
The literary female bosom; reft
Away its veil of coy reserve with "Zounds!
I love thee, Breton Beauty! All's no use!
Body and soul I love,—the big word's loose!"

CXIV.

He's greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
Nearest. Attend the solemn word I quote,
O Paul! *There's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*
Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!
Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!
Better and truer verse none ever wrote
(Despite the antique oustretched *a-i-on*)
Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

CXV.

Flat on his face, La Roque, and,—pressed to heart
His dexter hand,—Voltaire with bended knee!
Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart
Leaned over him his sister. "Well!" smirks he,
And "Well?" she answers, smiling—woman's art
To let a man's own mouth, not hers, decree

What shall be next move which decides the game :
Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame.

CXVI.

"Well!" this time forth affirmatively comes
With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through teeth
Close clenched o'er satisfaction, as the gums
Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath
Palate by lubricating tongue: "Well! crumbs
Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death
Likely from famine at Fame's feast! 'tis clear
I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

CXVII.

"La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise
Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop!
I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men's eyes
My proper manly garb and mount a-top
The pedestal that waits me, take the prize
Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop
To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,
Then, following, licked his heels: exactly so!

CXVIII.

"I like the prospect—their astonishment,
Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,
Mixed motives; how I see the brows quick bent!
'What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about
This change of estimation? Phœbus sent
His shafts as from Diana?' Critic pout
Turns courtier smile: 'Lo, him we took for her!
Pleasant mistake! You bear no malice, sir?'

CXIX.

"Eh, my Diana?" But Diana kept
Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp
Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept
Paul's very thoughts ere they had time to warp
From earnest into sport the words they leapt
To life with—changed as when maltreated harp
Renders in tinkle what some player-prig
Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX.

"What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,
My lessons end in loss?" at length fall slow
The pitying syllables, her lips allay
The satire of by keeping in full flow,
Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play:
"Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know
And altogether estimate applause
As just so many asinine hee-haws?

CXXI.

"I thought to show you" . . . "Show me," Paul in-broke,
"My poetry is rubbish, and the world
That rings with my renown a sorry joke!
What fairer test of worth than that, form furled,
I entered the arena? Yet you croak
Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurled
The dart and struck the Python! What, he crawls
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's?

CXXII.

"Nay, 'tis no laughing matter though absurd
If there's an end of honesty on earth!
La Roque sends letters, lying every word!
Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth
To the remotest age! Rousseau's the third
Who, driven to despair amid such dearth
Of people that want praising, finds no one
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton!

CXXIII.

"Somebody says—if a man writes at all
It is to show the writer's kith and kin
He was unjustly thought a natural;
And truly, sister, I have yet to win
Your favourable word, it seems, for Paul
Whose poetry you count not worth a pin

Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,
Rousseaus and suchlike : let them quack, who cares ?"

CXXIV.

"—To Paris with you, Paul! Not one word's waste
Further : my scrupulosity was vain !
Go triumph ! Be my foolish fears effaced
From memory's record ! Go, to come again
With glory crowned,—by sister re-embraced,
Cured of that strange delusion of her brain
Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats
On male limbs mostly when in petticoats !"

CXXV.

So laughed her last word, with the little touch
Of malice proper to the outraged pride
Of any artist in a work too much
Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried
The opposite procedure ! Cast your crutch
Away, no longer crippled, nor divide
The credit of your march to the World's Fair
With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there !"

CXXVI.

Crippled, forsooth ! what courser sprightlier pranced
Paris-ward than did Paul ? Nay, dreams lent wings :
He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.
Dreams ? wide-awake realities : no things
Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced
The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings
Crowned by Apollo—not to say with queens
Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII.

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before
The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc
Announces there's a giant at the door.
"Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."
"Lackey ! Malcrais,—mind, no word less nor more !—
Desires his presence. I've unearthed the brock :
Now, to transfix him !" There stands Paul erect,
Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII.

A bustling entrance : "Idol of my flame !
Can it be that my heart attains at last
Its longing ? that you stand, the very same
As in my visions ? . . . Ha ! hey, how ?" aghast
Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy's to blame !
You merely are the messenger ! Too fast
My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh !
Well, sir, the lady's substitute is—who ?"

CXXIX.

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands !
Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,
Though nor Malcrais nor any mistress stands
To meet your ardour ! So, you don't divine
Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's
Whole length and breadth ? Just he whereof no line
Had ever leave to blot your Journal—eh ?
Paul Desforges Maillard—otherwise Malcrais !"

CXXX.

And there the two stood, stare confronting smirk,
Awhile uncertain which should yield the *pas*.
In vain the Chevalier beat brain for quirk
To help in this conjuncture ; at length "Bah !
Boh ! Since I've made myself a fool, why shirk
The punishment of folly ? Ha, ha, ha,
Let me return your handshake !" Comic sock
For tragic buskin prompt thus changed La Roque.

CXXXI.

"I'm nobody—a wren-like journalist ;
You've flown at higher game and winged your bird,
The golden eagle ! That's the grand acquist !
Voltaire's sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred

Prettily round your feet; but if she missed
Priority of stroking, soon were stirred
The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire! away,
Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXXII.

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,
The two begin their journey. Need I say,
La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,
Had a long-standing little debt to pay,
And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare
Occasion for its due discharge? So, gay
And grenadier-like, marching to assault,
They reach the enemy's abode, there halt.

CXXXIII.

"I'll be announcer!" quoth La Roque: "I know,
Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,
How to procure an audience! He's not slow
To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire! Discard
The petticoats too soon,—you'll never show
Your *haut-de-chausses* and all they've made or marred
In your true person. Here's his servant. Pray,
Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais?"

CXXXIV.

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,
The man of self-respect,—more great man he!
And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,
And decorated to the fit degree
His person; 'twas enough to bear the stress
Of battle in the field, without, when free
From outside foes, inviting friends' attack
By—sword in hand? No,—ill-made coat on back!

CXXXV.

And, since the announcement of his visitor
Surprised him at his toilet,—never glass
Had such solicitation! "Black, now—or
Brown be the killing wig to wear? Alas,
Where's the rouge gone, this cheek were better for
A tender touch of? Melted to a mass,
All my pomatum! There's at all events
A devil—for he's got among my scents!"

CXXXVI.

So, "barbered ten times o'er," as Antony
Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last
Voltaire proceed to the fair presence: high
In colour, proud in port, as if a blast
Of trumpet bade the world "Take note! draws nigh
To Beauty, Power! Behold the Iconoclast,
The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod
Of iron for imposture! Ah my God!"

CXXXVII.

For there stands smirking Paul, and—what lights fierce
The situation as with sulphur flash—
There grinning stands La Roque! No carte-and-tierce
Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash
From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce
That armour against which so idly clash
The swords of priests and pedants! Victors there,
Two smirk and grin who have befooled—Voltaire!

CXXXVIII.

A moment's horror; then quick turn-about
On high-heeled shoe,—flurry of ruffles, flounce
Of wig-ties and of coat-tails,—and so out
Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes—bounce—
Voltaire in tragic exit! vows, no doubt,
Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce
Either, in point of fact? His anger's flash
Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX.

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh
To heart's content,—the joke defunct at once,
Dead in the birth, you see,—its epitaph
Was sober earnest. "Well, sir, for the nonce,
You've gained the laurel; never hope to graff
A second sprig of triumph there! Ensconce
Yourself again at Croisic: let it be
Enough you mastered both Voltaire and—me!

CXL.

"Don't linger here in Paris to parade
Your victory, and have the very boys
Point at you! 'There's the little mouse which made
Believe those two big lions that its noise,
Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed
Intelligence that—portent which destroys
All courage in the lion's heart, with horn
That's fable—there lay couched the unicorn!'

CXLI.

"Beware us, now we've found who fooled us! Quick
To cover! 'In proportion to men's fright,
Expect their fright's revenge!' quoth politic
Old Macchiavelli. As for me,—all's right:
I'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick
The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite!
So, keep your counsel, I advise! Adieu!
Good journey! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was—you!"

CXLII.

"—Yes, I'm Malcrais, and somebody beside,
You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed
Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale
Mortified poet. "Let their worst be tried,
I'm their match henceforth—very man and male!
Don't talk to me of knocking-under! man
And male must end what petticoats began!

CXLIII.

"How woman-like it is to apprehend
The world will eat its words! why, words transfixed
To stone, they stare at you in print,—at end,
Each writer's style and title! Choose betwixt
Fool and knave for his name, who should intend
To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed
With prospect of advantage! What is writ
Is writ: they've praised me, there's an end of it.

CXLIV.

"No, Dear, allow me! I shall print these same
Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.
Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame
What they—praised simply?—placed on pedestals,
Each piece a statue in the House of Fame!
Fast will they stand there, though their presence galls
The envious crew: such show their teeth, perhaps,
And snarl, but never bite! I know the chaps!"

CXLV.

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded! Pace
Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,
Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race
Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats
Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,
The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,
One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,
That needle under, stream with weedy rags!

CXLVI.

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,
Rude heritage but recognized domain,
Do as two here are doing: make hearth crack
With logs until thy chimney roar again
Jolly with fire-glow! Let its angle lack
No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain
To do a sister's office and laugh smooth
Thy corrugated brow—that scowls forsooth!

CXLVII.

Wherefore? Who does not know how these La Roques,
Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame,
Prove black white, white black, play at paradox
And, when they seem to lose it, win the game?
Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,
His fellow in rascality, call "fame!"

Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it,—quack,
quack, quack!
Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII.

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!
A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know
or care
As much for what to-day they clap or hiss
As for the fashion of the wigs they wear,
Then wonder at. There's fame which, bale
or bliss,—
Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire
Or not-so-great La Roque,—is taken back
By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX.

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!
No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the
maid,
Thenceforth for ever! One or two, I see,
Stuck by their poet: who the longest
stayed
Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he
Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid
A rhyming tribute "After death, survive—
He hoped he should; and died while yet
alive!"

CL.

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held
His peace and died in silent good old
age.
Him it was, curiosity impelled
To seek if there were extant still some
page
Of his great predecessor, rat who belled
The cat once, and would never deign
engage
In after-combat with mere mice,—saved from
More sonnetteering,—René Gentilhomme.

CLI.

Paul's story furnished forth that famous
play
Of Piron's "Métromanie": there you'll
find
He's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais
Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!
As for Voltaire, he's Damis. Good and gay
The plot and dialogue, and all's designed
To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the
laugh
Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII.

But truth, truth, that's the gold! and all the
good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes
up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and
fret
Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII.

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt
Of fitful flame,—twin births of our grey
brand
That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,
As sparkles want but fuel to expand
Into a conflagration no mere squirt
Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic
strand,
Had Fortune pleased posterity to chowse,
Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV.

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?
But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!
How often frustrate they of fame's award
Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew
Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled
and marred
And forced to put about the First-rate!
True,
Such tacks but for a time: still—small-craft
ride
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the
tide!

CLV.

Dear, shall I tell you? There's a simple test
Would serve, when people take on them to weigh
The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)
"What quality preponderating may
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife
By asking "Which one led a happy life?"

CLVI.

If one did, over his antagonist
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed
Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,
Mastered by his own means of might,—acquist
Of necessary sorrows,—he prevailed,
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII.

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sight—
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,
One dance of rogues and idiots! Not, to deal
More with things lovely? What provoked the spite
Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need
Of other nutriment than strife and greed!

CLVIII.

Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
Of all comprised within our actual scope
Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
Henceforward among groundlings? That's offence
Just as indubitably: stars abound
O'erhead, but then—what flowers make glad the ground!

CLIX.

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the steer
Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
Despair: but ever mid the whirling fear,
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!

CLX.

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,
And save my breath for better purpose. White
From grey our log has burned to: just one blink
That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite
The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink
Punish who sealed so deep into the night
Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long,—
Here pleads a live pretender: right your wrong!

I.

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
—Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

II.

Anyhow there's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting!)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

III.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing: I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that's behind.

IV.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
—Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss: such ears
Had old judges, it appears!

V.

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile "In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!"

VI.

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,—who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?—it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What "cicada"? Pooh!)
—Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music—flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

VIII.

So that when (ah joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

IX.

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,—indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

X.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
"Take the prize—a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!"

XI.

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

XII.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
—Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

XIII.

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

XIV.

That's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that's—Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

XV.

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue's built,
Tell the gazer "'Twas a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose lilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

XVI.

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,—
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,—one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,—

XVII.

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

XVIII.

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet? All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

FIRST SERIES.

1879.

MARTIN RELPH.

My grandfather says he remembers he saw,
when a youngster long ago,
On a bright May day, a strange old man,
with a beard as white as snow,
Stand on the hill outside our town like a
monument of woe,
And, striking his bare bald head the while,
sob out the reason—so!

If I last as long as Methuselah I shall never
forgive myself:
But—God forgive me, that I pray, unhappy
Martin Relph,
As coward, coward I call him—him, yes,
him! Away from me!
Get you behind the man I am now, you man
that I used to be!

What can have sewed my mouth up, set me
a-stare, all eyes, no tongue?
People have urged "You visit a scare too
hard on a lad so young!
You were taken aback, poor boy," they urge,
"no time to regain your wits:
Besides it had maybe cost you life." Ay,
there is the cap which fits!

So, cap me, the coward,—thus! No fear!
A cuff on the brow does good:
The feel of it hinders a worm inside which
bores at the brain for food.
See now, there certainly seems excuse: for
a moment, I trust, dear friends,
The fault was but folly, no fault of mine, or
if mine, I have made amends!

For, every day that is first of May, on the
hill-top, here stand I,
Martin Relph, and I strike my brow, and
publish the reason why,
When there gathers a crowd to mock the
fool. No fool, friends, since the bite
Of a worm inside is worse to bear: pray God
I have baulked him quite!

I'll tell you. Certainly much excuse! It
came of the way they cooped
Us peasantry up in a ring just here, close
huddling because tight-hooped
By the red-coats round us villagers all: they
meant we should see the sight
And take the example,—see, not speak, for
speech was the Captain's right.

"You clowns on the slope, beware!" cried
he: "This woman about to die
Gives by her fate fair warning to such ac-
quaintance as play the spy.
Henceforth who meddle with matters of state
above them perhaps will learn
That peasants should stick to their plough-
tail, leave to the King the King's con-
cern.

"Here's a quarrel that sets the land on
fire, between King George and his
foes:
What call has a man of your kind—much
less, a woman—to interpose?
Yet you needs must be meddling, folk like
you, not foes—so much the worse!
The many and loyal should keep themselves
unmixed with the few perverse.

"Is the counsel hard to follow? I gave it
you plainly a month ago,
And where was the good? The rebels have
learned just all that they need to know.
Not a month since in we quietly marched: a
week, and they had the news,
From a list complete of our rank and file to
a note of our caps and shoes.

"All about all we did and all we were doing
and like to do!
Only, I catch a letter by luck, and capture
who wrote it, too.
Some of you men look black enough, but the
milk-white face demure
Betokens the finger foul with ink: 'tis a
woman who writes, be sure!

"Is it 'Dearie, how much I miss your
mouth!'—good natural stuff, she pens?
Some sprinkle of that, for a blind, of course:
with talk about cocks and hens,
How 'robin has built on the apple-tree, and
our creeper which came to grief
Through the frost, we feared, is twining
afresh round casement in famous leaf.'

"But all for a blind! She soon glides frank
into 'Horrid the place is grown
With Officers here and Privates there, no
nook we may call our own:
And Farmer Giles has a tribe to house, and
lodging will be to seek
For the second Company sure to come ('tis
whispered) on Monday week.'

"And so to the end of the chapter! There!
The murder, you see, was out:
Easy to guess how the change of mind in the
rebels was brought about!
Safe in the trap would they now lie snug, had
treachery made no sign:
But treachery meets a just reward, no matter
if fools malign!

"That traitors had played us false, was
proved—sent news which fell so pat:
And the murder was out—this letter of love,
the sender of this sent that!

'Tis an ugly job, though, all the same—a
hateful, to have to deal
With a case of the kind, when a woman's in
fault: we soldiers need nerves of steel!

"So, I gave her a chance, despatched post-
haste a message to Vincent Parkes
Whom she wrote to; easy to find he was,
since one of the King's own clerks,
Ay, kept by the King's own gold in the town
close by where the rebels camp:
A sort of a lawyer, just the man to betray
our sort—the scamp!

"'If her writing is simple and honest and
only the lover-like stuff it looks,
And if you yourself are a loyalist, nor down
in the rebels' books,
Come quick,' said I, 'and in person prove
you are each of you clear of crime,
Or martial law must take its course: this day
next week's the time!'

"Next week is now: does he come? Not
he! Clean gone, our clerk, in a trice!
He has left his sweetheart here in the lurch:
no need of a warning twice!
His own neck free, but his partner's fast in
the noose still, here she stands
To pay for her fault. 'Tis an ugly job: but
soldiers obey commands.

"And hearken wherefore I make a speech!
Should any acquaintance share
The folly that led to the fault that is now to
be punished, let fools beware!
Look black, if you please, but keep hands
white: and, above all else, keep wives—
Or sweethearts or what they may be—from
ink! Not a word now, on your lives!"

Black? but the Pit's own pitch was white to
the Captain's face—the brute
With the bloated cheeks and the bulgy nose
and the bloodshot eyes to suit!
He was muddled with wine, they say: more
like, he was out of his wits with fear;
He had but a handful of men, that's true,—a
riot might cost him dear.

And all that time stood Rosamund Page, with pinioned arms and face
Bandaged about, on the turf marked out for the party's firing-place.
I hope she was wholly with God: I hope 'twas His angel stretched a hand
To steady her so, like the shape of stone you see in our church-aisle stand.

I hope there was no vain fancy pierced the bandage to vex her eyes,
No face within which she missed without, no questions and no replies—
"Why did you leave me to die?"—"Because . . ." Oh, fiends, too soon you grin
At merely a moment of hell, like that—such heaven as hell ended in!

Let mine end too! He gave the word, up went the guns in a line.
Those heaped on the hill were blind as dumb,—for, of all eyes, only mine
Looked over the heads of the foremost rank. Some fell on their knees in prayer,
Some sank to the earth, but all shut eyes, with a sole exception there.

That was myself, who had stolen up last, had sidled behind the group:
I am highest of all on the hill-top, there stand fixed while the others stoop!
From head to foot in a serpent's twine am I tightened: *I* touch ground?
No more than a gibbet's rigid corpse which the fetters rust around!

Can I speak, can I breathe, can I burst—aught else but see, see, only see?
And see I do—for there comes in sight—a man, it sure must be!—
Who staggeringly, stumblingly rises, falls, rises, at random flings his weight
On and on, anyhow onward—a man that's mad he arrives too late!

Else why does he wave a something white high-flourished above his head?
Why does not he call, cry,—curse the fool! —why throw up his arms instead?
O take this fist in your own face, fool! Why does not yourself shout "Stay!
Here's a man comes rushing, might and main, with something he's mad to say"?

And a minute, only a moment, to have hell-fire boil up in your brain,
And ere you can judge things right, choose heaven,—time's over, repentance vain!
They level: a volley, a smoke and the clearing of smoke: I see no more
Of the man smoke hid, nor his frantic arms, nor the something white he bore.

But stretched on the field, some half-mile off, is an object. Surely dumb,
Deaf, blind were we struck, that nobody heard, not one of us saw him come!
Has he fainted through fright? One may well believe! What is it he holds so fast?
Turn him over, examine the face! Heyday! What, Vincent Parkes at last?

Dead! dead as she, by the self-same shot: one bullet has ended both,
Her in the body and him in the soul. They laugh at our plighted troth.
"Till death us do part?" Till death us do join past parting—that sounds like
Betrothal indeed! O Vincent Parkes, what need has my fist to strike?

I helped you: thus were you dead and wed: one bound, and your soul reached hers!
There is clenched in your hand the thing, signed, sealed, the paper which plain avers
She is innocent, innocent, plain as print, with the King's Arms broad engraved:
No one can hear, but if anyone high on the hill can see, she's saved!

And torn his garb and bloody his lips with heart-break—plain it grew
How the week's delay had been brought about: each guess at the end proved true.

It was hard to get at the folk in power: such
waste of time! and then
Such pleading and praying, with, all the
while, his lamb in the lions' den!

And at length when he wrung their pardon
out, no end to the stupid forms—
The licence and leave: I make no doubt—
what wonder if passion warms
The pulse in a man if you play with his
heart?—he was something hasty in
speech;
Anyhow, none would quicken the work: he
had to beseech, beseech!

And the thing once signed, sealed, safe in his
grasp,—what followed but fresh delays?
For the floods were out, he was forced to
take such a roundabout of ways!
And 'twas "Halt there!" at every turn of
the road, since he had to cross the
thick
Of the red-coats: what did they care for him
and his "Quick, for God's sake, quick!"

Horse? but he had one: had it how long?
till the first knave smirked "You brag
Yourself a friend of the King's? then lend to
a King's friend here your nag!"
Money to buy another? Why, piece by piece
they plundered him still,
With their "Wait you must,—no help: if
aught can help you, a guinea will!"

And a borough there was—I forget the name
—whose Mayor must have the bench
Of Justices ranged to clear a doubt: for
"Vincent," thinks he, sounds French!
It well may have driven him daft, God knows!
all man can certainly know
Is—rushing and falling and rising, at last he
arrived in a horror—so!

When a word, cry, gasp, would have rescued
both! Ay bite me! The worm begins
At his work once more. Had cowardice
proved—that only—my sin of sins!

Friends, look you here! Suppose . . . sup-
pose . . . But mad I am, needs must
be!
Judas the Damned would never have dared
such a sin as I dream! For, see!

Suppose I had sneakingly loved her myself,
my wretched self, and dreamed
In the heart of me "She were better dead
than happy and his!"—while gleamed
A light from hell as I spied the pair in a
perfectest embrace,
He the saviour and she the saved,—bliss born
of the very murder-place!

No! Say I was scared, friends! Call me
fool and coward, but nothing worse!
Jeer at the fool and gibe at the coward!
'Twas ever the coward's curse
That fear breeds fancies in such: such take
their shadow for substance still,
—A fiend at their back. I liked poor Parkes,
—loved Vincent, if you will!

And her—why, I said "Good morrow" to
her, "Good even," and nothing more:
The neighbourly way! She was just to me
as fifty had been before.
So, coward it is and coward shall be! There's
a friend, now! Thanks! A drink
Of water I wanted: and now I can walk,
get home by myself, I think.

PHEIDIPPIDES.

[Pheidippides, when the Persians went up into Attica, ran all the way from Athens to Sparta to demand aid, and ran back again in time to be at Marathon; and then, the battle over, ran to Athens to announce the victory—falling dead, having done so.]

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν.

FIRST I salute this soil of the blessed, river
and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes,
honour to all!

Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear ![1]
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin,[2] praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever,—O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix,[3] see, I return!
See, 'tis myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens sink,
Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there's lightning in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"
O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athené, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off and away was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,
"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid you erewhile?

[1] Athené. [2] Apollo and Artemis.
[3] The grasshopper, the national emblem.

Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!
Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure? at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!"—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof:
All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.

"Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:
"How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
—Fennel—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode)
"While, as for thee . . ." But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge![1]
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thyself?

[1] A Greek idiom for a dangerous position.

Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field[1]
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

[1] Marathon.

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!"—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a God loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

HALBERT AND HOB.

HERE is a thing that happened. Like wild beasts whelped, for den,
In a wild part of North England, there lived once two wild men
Inhabiting one homestead, neither a hovel nor hut,
Time out of mind their birthright: father and son, these—but—
Such a son, such a father! Most wildness by degrees
Softens away: yet, last of their line, the wildest and worst were these.

Criminals, then? Why, no: they did not murder and rob;
But, give them a word, they returned a blow—old Halbert as young Hob:
Harsh and fierce of word, rough and savage of deed,
Hated or feared the more—who knows?—the genuine wild-beast breed.

Thus were they found by the few sparse folk of the country-side;
But how fared each with other? E'en beasts couch, hide by hide,

In a growling, grudged agreement: so, father and son aye curled
The closelier up in their den because the last of their kind in the world.

Still, beast irks beast on occasion. One Christmas night of snow,
Came father and son to words—such words! more cruel because the blow
To crown each word was wanting, while taunt matched gibe, and curse
Competed with oath in wager, like pastime in hell,—nay, worse:
For pastime turned to earnest, as up there sprang at last
The son at the throat of the father, seized him and held him fast.

"Out of this house you go!"—(there followed a hideous oath)—
"This oven where now we bake, too hot to hold us both!
If there's snow outside, there's coolness: out with you, bide a spell
In the drift and save the sexton the charge of a parish shell!"

Now, the old trunk was tough, was solid as stump of oak
Untouched at the core by a thousand years: much less had its seventy broke
One whipcord nerve in the muscly mass from neck to shoulder-blade
Of the mountainous man, whereon his child's rash hand like a feather weighed.

Nevertheless at once did the mammoth shut his eyes,
Drop chin to breast, drop hands to sides, stand stiffened—arms and thighs
All of a piece—struck mute, much as a sentry stands,
Patient to take the enemy's fire: his captain so commands.

Whereat the son's wrath flew to fury at such sheer scorn
Of his puny strength by the giant eld thus acting the babe new-born:
And "Neither will this turn serve!" yelled he. "Out with you! Trundle, log!
If you cannot tramp and trudge like a man, try all-fours like a dog!"

Still the old man stood mute. So, logwise,—down to floor
Pulled from his fireside place, dragged on from hearth to door,—
Was he pushed, a very log, staircase along, until
A certain turn in the steps was reached, a yard from the house-door-sill.

Then the father opened eyes—each spark of their rage extinct,—
Temples, late black, dead-blanched,—right-hand with left-hand linked,—
He faced his son submissive; when slow the accents came,
They were strangely mild though his son's rash hand on his neck lay all the same.

"Hob, on just such a night of a Christmas long ago,
For such a cause, with such a gesture, did I drag—so—
My father down thus far: but, softening here, I heard
A voice in my heart, and stopped: you wait for an outer word.

"For your own sake, not mine, soften you too! Untrod
Leave this last step we reach, nor brave the finger of God!
I dared not pass its lifting: I did well. I nor blame
Nor praise you. I stopped here: and, Hob, do you the same!"

Straightway the son relaxed his hold of the father's throat.
They mounted, side by side, to the room again: no note
Took either of each, no sign made each to either: last
As first, in absolute silence, their Christmas-night they passed.

At dawn, the father sate on, dead, in the self-same place,
With an outburst blackening still the old bad fighting-face:
But the son crouched all a-tremble like any lamb new-yeaned.

When he went to the burial, someone's staff he borrowed—tottered and leaned.
But his lips were loose, not locked,—kept muttering, mumbling. "There!
At his cursing and swearing!" the youngsters cried: but the elders thought "In prayer."
A boy threw stones: he picked them up and stored them in his vest.

So tottered, muttered, mumbled he, till he died, perhaps found rest.
"Is there a reason in nature for these hard hearts?" O Lear,
That a reason out of nature must turn them soft, seems clear!

IVÀN IVÀNOVITCH.

"THEY tell me, your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,
"Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool-box serves with us.
Arm but each man with his axe, 'tis a hammer and saw and plane
And chisel, and—what know I else? We should imitate in vain
The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze,
He cleaves, clamps, dovetails in,—no need of our nails and brads,—
The manageable pine: 'tis said he could shave himself
With the axe,—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,
Does he work and play at once!"
Quoth my friend the Russ to me,
"Ay, that and more beside on occasion! It scarce may be
You never heard tell a tale told children, time out of mind,
By father and mother and nurse, for a moral that's behind,
Which children quickly seize. If the incident happened at all,
We place it in Peter's time when hearts were great not small,
Germanized, Frenchified. I wager 'tis old to you
As the story of Adam and Eve, and possibly quite as true."

In the deep of our land, 'tis said, a village from out the woods
Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.
Through forestry right and left, black verst[1] and verst of pine,
From village to village runs the road's long wide bare line.
Clearance and clearance break the else-unconquered growth
Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth
Man's inch of masterdom,—spot of life, spirt of fire,—
To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire
Throughout the monstrous wild, a-hungered to resume
Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb:
Defrauded by man's craft which clove from North to South
This highway broad and straight e'en from the Neva's mouth
To Moscow's gates of gold. So, spot of life and spirt
Of fire aforesaid, burn, each village death-begirt
By wall and wall of pine—unprobed un-dreamed abyss.

[1] About two-thirds of a mile.

Early one winter morn, in such a village as this,
Snow-whitened everywhere except the middle road
Ice-roughed by track of sledge, there worked by his abode
Ivàn Ivànovitch, the carpenter, employed
On a huge shipmast trunk; his axe now trimmed and toyed
With branch and twig, and now some chop athwart the bole
Changed bole to billets, bared at once the sap and soul.
About him, watched the work his neighbours sheepskin-clad;
Each bearded mouth puffed steam, each grey eye twinkled glad
To see the sturdy arm which, never stopping play,
Proved strong man's blood still boils, freeze winter as he may.
Sudden, a burst of bells. Out of the road, on edge
Of the hamlet — horse's hoofs galloping. "How, a sledge?
What's here?" cried all as—in, up to the open space,
Workyard and market-ground, folk's common meeting-place,—
Stumbled on, till he fell, in one last bound for life,
A horse: and, at his heels, a sledge held—"Dmìtri's wife!
Back without Dmìtri too! and children—where are they?
Only a frozen corpse!"

They drew it forth: then—"Nay,
Not dead, though like to die! Gone hence a month ago:
Home again, this rough jaunt—alone through night and snow—
What can the cause be? Hark—Droug, old horse, how he groans:
His day's done! Chafe away, keep chafing, for she moans:
She's coming to! Give here: see, mother-kin, your friends!
Cheer up, all safe at home! Warm inside makes amends
For outside cold,—sup quick! Don't look as we were bears!
What is it startles you? What strange adventure stares
Up at us in your face? You know friends—which is which?
I'm Vàssili, he's Sergeì, Ivàn Ivànovitch . . ."

At the word, the woman's eyes, slow-wandering till they neared
The blue eyes o'er the bush of honey-coloured beard,
Took in full light and sense and—torn to rags, some dream
Which hid the naked truth—O loud and long the scream
She gave, as if all power of voice within her throat
Poured itself wild away to waste in one dread note!
Then followed gasps and sobs, and then the steady flow
Of kindly tears: the brain was saved, a man might know.
Down fell her face upon the good friend's propping knee;
His broad hands smoothed her head, as fain to brush it free
From fancies, swarms that stung like bees unhived. He soothed—
"Loukèria, Loùscha!"—still he, fondling, smoothed and smoothed.
At last her lips formed speech.

"Ivàn, dear—you indeed!
You, just the same dear you! While I . . .
O intercede,
Sweet Mother, with thy Son Almighty—let his might
Bring yesterday once more, undo all done last night!
But this time yesterday, Ivàn, I sat like you,
A child on either knee, and, dearer than the two,

A babe inside my arms, close to my heart—
that's lost
In morsels o'er the snow! Father, Son,
Holy Ghost,
Cannot you bring again my blessed yesterday?"

When no more tears would flow, she told her
tale: this way.

"Maybe, a month ago,—was it not?—news
came here,
They wanted, deeper down, good workmen
fit to rear
A church and roof it in. 'We'll go,' my
husband said:
'None understands like me to melt and
mould their lead.'
So, friends here helped us off—Ivàn, dear,
you the first!
How gay we jingled forth, all five—(my
heart will burst)—
While Dmìtri shook the reins, urged Droug
upon his track!

"Well, soon the month ran out, we just
were coming back,
When yesterday—behold, the village was on
fire!
Fire ran from house to house. What help,
as, nigh and nigher,
The flames came furious? 'Haste,' cried
Dmìtri, 'men must do
The little good man may: to sledge and in
with you,
You and our three! We check the fire by
laying flat
Each building in its path,—I needs must stay
for that,—
But you . . . no time for talk! Wrap
round you every rug,
Cover the couple close,—you'll have the
babe to hug.
No care to guide old Droug, he knows his
way, by guess,
Once start him on the road: but chirrup,
none the less!
The snow lies glib as glass and hard as steel,
and soon
You'll have rise, fine and full, a marvel of
a moon.
Hold straight up, all the same, this lighted
twist of pitch!
Once home and with our friend Ivàn Ivàno-
vitch,
All's safe: I have my pay in pouch, all's
right with me,
So I but find as safe you and our precious
three!
Off, Droug!'—because the flames had
reached us, and the men
Shouted 'But lend a hand, Dmìtri—as good
as ten!'

"So, in we bundled—I, and those God gave
me once;
Old Droug, that's stiff at first, seemed youth-
ful for the nonce:
He understood the case, galloping straight
ahead.
Out came the moon: my twist soon dwindled,
feebly red
In that unnatural day—yes, daylight, bred
between
Moon-light and snow-light, lamped those
grotto-depths which screen
Such devils from God's eye. Ah, pines, how
straight you grow
Nor bend one pitying branch, true breed of
brutal snow!
Some undergrowth had served to keep the
devils blind
While we escaped outside their border!

"Was that—wind?
Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his
ears, he snuffs,
Snorts,—never such a snort! then plunges,
knows the sough's
Only the wind: yet, no—our breath goes up
too straight!
Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder,
at a rate

There's no mistaking more! Shall I lean
out—look—learn
The truth whatever it be? Pad, pad! At
last, I turn—

"'Tis the regular pad of the wolves in pur-
suit of the life in the sledge!
An army they are: close-packed they press
like the thrust of a wedge:
They increase as they hunt: for I see,
through the pine-trunks ranged each
side,
Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider
and still more wide
The four-footed steady advance. The fore-
most—none may pass:
They are elders and lead the line, eye and
eye—green-glowing brass!
But a long way distant still. Droug, save
us! He does his best:
Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—
one reaches . . . How utter the rest?
O that Satan-faced first of the band! How
he lolls out the length of his tongue,
How he laughs and lets gleam his white
teeth! He is on me, his paws pry
among
The wraps and the rugs! O my pair, my
twin-pigeons, lie still and seem dead!
Stepàn, he shall never have you for a meal,
—here's your mother instead!
No, he will not be counselled—must cry,
poor Stiòpka, so foolish! though first
Of my boy-brood, he was not the best: nay,
neighbours have called him the worst:
He was puny, an undersized slip,—a darling
to me, all the same!
But little there was to be praised in the boy,
and a plenty to blame.
I loved him with heart and soul, yes—but,
deal him a blow for a fault,
He would sulk for whole days. 'Foolish
boy! lie still or the villain will vault,
Will snatch you from over my head!' No
use! he cries, screams,—who can hold
Fast a boy in a frenzy of fear! It follows—
as I foretold!
The Satan-face snatched and snapped: I
tugged, I tore—and then
His brother too needs must shriek! If one
must go, 'tis men
The Tsar needs, so we hear, not ailing boys!
Perhaps
My hands relaxed their grasp, got tangled in
the wraps:
God, he was gone! I looked: there tumbled
the cursed crew,
Each fighting for a share: too busy to pursue!
That's so far gain at least: Droug, gallop
another verst
Or two, or three—God sends we beat them,
arrive the first!
A mother who boasts two boys was ever
accounted rich:
Some have not a boy: some have, but lose
him,—God knows which
Is worse: how pitiful to see your weakling pine
And pale and pass away! Strong brats, this
pair of mine!

"O misery! for while I settle to what near
seems
Content, I am 'ware again of the tramp, and
again there gleams—
Point and point—the line, eyes, levelled
green brassy fire!
So soon is resumed your chase? Will nothing
appease, nought tire
The furies? And yet I think—I am certain
the race is slack,
And the numbers are nothing like. Not a
quarter of the pack!
Feasters and those full-fed are staying be-
hind . . . Ah why?
We'll sorrow for that too soon! Now,—
gallop, reach home, and die,
Nor ever again leave house, to trust our life
in the trap
For life—we call a sledge! Teriòscha, in
my lap!
Yes, I'll lie down upon you, tight-tie you with
the strings
Here—of my heart! No fear, this time,
your mother flings . . .

Flings? I flung? Never! but think!—a
woman, after all
Contending with a wolf! Save you I must
and shall,
Terentiï!
"How now? What, you still head
the race,
Your eyes and tongue and teeth crave fresh
food, Satan-face?
There and there! Plain I struck green fire
out! Flash again?
All a poor fist can do to damage eyes proves vain!
My fist—why not crunch that? He is wanton
for . . . O God,
Why give this wolf his taste? Common
wolves scrape and prod
The earth till out they scratch some corpse—
mere putrid flesh!
Why must this glutton leave the faded, choose
the fresh?
Terentiï—God, feel!—his neck keeps fast
thy bag
Of holy things, saints' bones, this Satan-face
will drag
Forth, and devour along with him, our Pope
declared
The relics were to save from danger!

"Spurned, not spared!
'Twas through my arms, crossed arms, he—
nuzzling now with snout,
Now ripping, tooth and claw—plucked, pulled
Terentiï out,
A prize indeed! I saw—how could I else
but see?—
My precious one—I bit to hold back—pulled
from me!
Up came the others, fell to dancing—did the
imps!—
Skipped as they scampered round. There's
one is grey, and limps:
Who knows but old bad Màrpha,—she always
owed me spite
And envied me my births,—skulks out of
doors at night
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood,
And laps the youthful life, then slinks from
out the wood,
Squats down at door by dawn, spins there
demure as erst
—No strength, old crone,—not she!—to
crawl forth half a verst!

"Well, I escaped with one: 'twixt one and
none there lies
The space 'twixt heaven and hell. And see,
a rose-light dyes
The endmost snow: 'tis dawn, 'tis day, 'tis
safe at home!
We have outwitted you! Ay, monsters,
snarl and foam,
Fight each the other fiend, disputing for a
share,—
Forgetful, in your greed, our finest off we bear,
Tough Droug and I,—my babe, my boy that
shall be man,
My man that shall be more, do all a hunter can
To trace and follow and find and catch and
crucify
Wolves, wolfkins, all your crew! A thou-
sand deaths shall die
The whimperingest cub that ever squeezed
the teat!
'Take that!' we'll stab you with,—'the
tenderness we met
When, wretches, you danced round—not this,
thank God—not this!
Hellhounds, we baulk you!'

"But—Ah, God above!—Bliss, bliss—
Not the band, no! And yet—yes, for Droug
knows him! One—
This only of them all has said 'She saves a
son!'
His fellows disbelieve such luck: but he
believes,
He lets them pick the bones, laugh at him in
their sleeves:
He's off and after us,—one speck, one spot,
one ball
Grows bigger, bound on bound,—one wolf
as good as all!
Oh but I know the trick! Have at the
snaky tongue!
That's the right way with wolves! Go, tell
your mates I wrung

The panting morsel out, left you to howl
your worst !
Now for it—now ! Ah me ! I know him—
thrice-accurst
Satan-face,—him to the end my foe !

"All fight's in vain :
This time the green brass points pierce to
my very brain.
I fall—fall as I ought—quite on the babe
I guard :
I overspread with flesh the whole of him.
Too hard
To die this way, torn piecemeal ? Move
hence ? Not I—one inch !
Gnaw through me, through and through :
flat thus I lie nor flinch !
O God, the feel of the fang furrowing my
shoulder !—see !
It grinds—it grates the bone. O Kìrill
under me,
Could I do more ? Beside he knew wolf's
way to win :
I clung, closed round like wax : yet in he
wedged and in,
Past my neck, past my breasts, my heart,
until . . . how feels
The onion-bulb your knife parts, pushing
through its peels,
Till out you scoop its clove wherein lie stalk
and leaf
And bloom and seed unborn ?

"That slew me : yes, in brief,
I died then, dead I lay doubtlessly till Droug
stopped
Here, I suppose. I come to life, I find me
propped
Thus—how or when or why,—I know not.
Tell me, friends,
All was a dream : laugh quick and say the
nightmare ends !
Soon I shall find my house : 'tis over there :
in proof,
Save for that chimney heaped with snow,
you'd see the roof
Which holds my three—my two—my one—
not one ?

"Life's mixed
With misery, yet we live—must live. The
Satan fixed
His face on mine so fast, I took its print as pitch
Takes what it cools beneath. Ivàn Ivànovitch,
'Tis you unharden me, you thaw, disperse
the thing !
Only keep looking kind, the horror will not
cling.
Your face smooths fast away each print of
Satan. Tears
—What good they do ! Life's sweet, and
all its after-years,
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I owe you ! Yours am I !
May God reward you, dear !"

Down she sank. Solemnly
Ivàn rose, raised his axe,—for fitly, as she
knelt,
Her head lay : well-apart, each side, her
arms hung,—dealt
Lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow—
no need of more !
Headless she knelt on still : that pine was
sound at core
(Neighbours were used to say)—cast-iron-
kernelled—which
Taxed for a second stroke Ivàn Ivànovitch.

The man was scant of words as strokes. "It
had to be :
I could no other : God it was bade 'Act for me!'"
Then stooping, peering round—what is it
now he lacks ?
A proper strip of bark wherewith to wipe his
axe.
Which done, he turns, goes in, closes the
door behind.
The others mute remain, watching the blood-
snake wind
Into a hiding-place among the splinter-heaps.

At length, still mute, all move : one lifts,—
from where it steeps
Redder each ruddy rag of pine,—the head :
two more
Take up the dripping body : then, mute still
as before,

Move in a sort of march, march on till marching ends
Opposite to the church; where halting,—who suspends,
By its long hair, the thing, deposits in its place
The piteous head: once more the body shows no trace
Of harm done: there lies whole the Loùscha, maid and wife
And mother, loved until this latest of her life.
Then all sit on the bank of snow which bounds a space
Kept free before the porch for judgment: just the place!

Presently all the souls, man, woman, child, which make
The village up, are found assembling for the sake
Of what is to be done. The very Jews are there:
A Gipsy-troop, though bound with horses for the Fair,
Squats with the rest. Each heart with its conception seethes
And simmers, but no tongue speaks: one may say,—none breathes.

Anon from out the church totters the Pope —the priest—
Hardly alive, so old, a hundred years at least.
With him, the Commune's head, a hoary senior too,
Stàrosta, that's his style,—like Equity Judge with you,—
Natural Jurisconsult: then, fenced about with furs,
Pomeschìk,—Lord of the Land, who wields —and none demurs—
A power of life and death. They stoop, survey the corpse.

Then, straightened on his staff, the Stàrosta —the thorpe's
Sagaciousest old man—hears what you just have heard,
From Droug's first inrush, all, up to Ivàn's last word
"God bade me act for him: I dared not disobey!"

Silence—the Pomeschìk broke with "A wild wrong way
Of righting wrong—if wrong there were, such wrath to rouse!
Why was not law observed? What article allows
Whoso may please to play the judge, and, judgment dealt,
Play executioner, as promptly as we pelt
To death, without appeal, the vermin whose sole fault
Has been—it dared to leave the darkness of its vault,
Intrude upon our day! Too sudden and too rash!
What was this woman's crime? Suppose the church should crash
Down where I stand, your lord: bound are my serfs to dare
Their utmost that I 'scape: yet, if the crashing scare
My children,—as you are,—if sons fly, one and all,
Leave father to his fate,—poor cowards though I call
The runaways, I pause before I claim their life
Because they prized it more than mine. I would each wife
Died for her husband's sake, each son to save his sire:
'Tis glory, I applaud—scarce duty, I require.
Ivàn Ivànovitch has done a deed that's named
Murder by law and me: who doubts, may speak unblamed!"

All turned to the old Pope. "Ay, children, I am old—
How old, myself have got to know no longer. Rolled
Quite round, my orb of life, from infancy to age,
Seems passing back again to youth. A certain stage

At least I reach, or dream I reach, where I discern
Truer truths, laws behold more lawlike than we learn
When first we set our foot to tread the course I trod
With man to guide my steps: who leads me now is God.
'Your young men shall see visions:' and in my youth I saw
And paid obedience to man's visionary law:
'Your old men shall dream dreams:' and, in my age, a hand
Conducts me through the cloud round law to where I stand
Firm on its base,—know cause, who, before, knew effect.

"The world lies under me: and nowhere I detect
So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life.
'Shall the dead praise thee?' No! 'The whole live world is rife,
God, with thy glory,' rather! Life then, God's best of gifts,
For what shall man exchange? For life—when so he shifts
The weight and turns the scale, lets life for life restore
God's balance, sacrifice the less to gain the more,
Substitute—for low life, another's or his own—
Life large and liker God's who gave it: thus alone
May life extinguish life that life may trulier be!
How low this law descends on earth, is not for me
To trace: complexed becomes the simple, intricate
The plain, when I pursue law's winding. 'Tis the straight
Outflow of law I know and name: to law, the fount
Fresh from God's footstool, friends, follow while I remount.

"A mother bears a child: perfection is complete
So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat
The miracle of life,—herself was born so just
A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.
Crowned by this crowning pride,—how say you, should she spurn
Regality—discrowned, unchilded, by her choice
Of barrenness exchanged for fruit which made rejoice
Creation, though life's self were lost in giving birth
To life more fresh and fit to glorify God's earth?
How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's torch
Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,
Let fall the same? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings:
The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things
Shall she be classed? Because of motherhood, each male
Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:
His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,
Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.
The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire
Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,
Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest
Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.
What's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,
Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now!
Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge

On how or why the loss: life left to utter
'lost'
Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post
Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels:
That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—
Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.
Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less
To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold He saw
The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law,
Whereof first instrument was first intelligence
Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense,
The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface
Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.
Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found
A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,
Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I hold, has done, this day,
No otherwise than did, in ages long ago,
Moses when he made known the purport of that flow
Of fire athwart the law's twain-tables! I proclaim
Ivàn Ivànovitch God's servant!"

At which name
Uprose that creepy whisper from out the crowd, is wont
To swell and surge and sink when fellowmen confront
A punishment that falls on fellow flesh and blood,
Appallingly beheld — shudderingly understood,
No less, to be the right, the just, the merciful.
"God's servant!" hissed the crowd.

When that Amen grew dull
And died away and left acquittal plain adjudged,
"Amen!" last sighed the lord. "There's none shall say I grudged
Escape from punishment in such a novel case.
Deferring to old age and holy life,—be grace
Granted! say I. No less, scruples might shake a sense
Firmer than I boast mine. Law's law, and evidence
Of breach therein lies plain,—blood-red-bright,—all may see!
Yet all absolve the deed: absolved the deed must be!

"And next—as mercy rules the hour—methinks 'twere well
You signify forthwith its sentence, and dispel
The doubts and fears, I judge, which busy now the head
Law puts a halter round—a halo—you, instead!
Ivàn Ivànovitch—what think you he expects
Will follow from his feat? Go, tell him—law protects
Murder, for once: no need he longer keep behind
The Sacred Pictures—where skulks Innocence enshrined,
Or I missay! Go, some! You others, haste and hide
The dismal object there: get done, whate'er betide!"

So, while the youngers raised the corpse, the elders trooped
Silently to the house: where halting, someone stooped,
Listened beside the door; all there was silent too.
Then they held counsel; then pushed door and, passing through,
Stood in the murderer's presence.
Ivàn Ivànovitch
Knelt, building on the floor that Kremlin rare and rich

He deftly cut and carved on lazy winter nights.
Some five young faces watched, breathlessly, as, to rights,
Piece upon piece, he reared the fabric nigh complete.
Stèscha, Ivàn's old mother, sat spinning by the heat
Of the oven where his wife Kàtia stood baking bread.
Ivàn's self, as he turned his honey-coloured head,
Was just in act to drop, 'twixt fir-cones,—each a dome,—
The scooped-out yellow gourd presumably the home
Of Kolokol the Big: the bell, therein to hitch,
—An acorn-cup—was ready: Ivàn Ivànovitch
Turned with it in his mouth.

They told him he was free
As air to walk abroad. "How otherwise?" asked he.

TRAY.

SING me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of soul, ye bards!
Quoth Bard the first:
"Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm and eke his habergeon . . ."
Sir Olaf and his bard——!

"That sin-scathed brow" (quoth Bard the second)
"That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting death . . .
You too without your host have reckoned!

"A beggar-child" (let's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

"'Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet!
Good dog! What, off again? There's yet
Another child to save? All right!

"'How strange we saw no other fall!
It's instinct in the animal.
Good dog! But he's a long while under:
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall!

"'Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be? Well, that's prime!
Now, did you ever? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime!'

"And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—
Till somebody, prerogatived
With reason, reasoned: 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

"'John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase—that animal for me!
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteenpence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see!'"

NED BRATTS.

[See John Bunyan's inimitable "Life and Death of Mr. Badman," where the story is told as only Bunyan can tell a story.]

'TWAS Bedford Special Assize, one daft Midsummer's Day:
A broiling blasting June,—was never its like, men say.
Corn stood sheaf-ripe already, and trees looked yellow as that;
Ponds drained dust-dry, the cattle lay foaming around each flat.

Inside town, dogs went mad, and folk kept bibbing beer
While the parsons prayed for rain. 'Twas horrible, yes—but queer:
Queer—for the sun laughed gay, yet nobody moved a hand
To work one stroke at his trade: as given to understand
That all was come to a stop, work and such worldly ways,
And the world's old self about to end in a merry blaze.
Midsummer's Day moreover was the first of Bedford Fair,
With Bedford Town's tag-rag and bobtail a-bowsing there.

But the Court House, Quality crammed: through doors ope, windows wide,
High on the Bench you saw sit Lordships side by side.
There frowned Chief Justice Jukes, fumed learned Brother Small,
And fretted their fellow Judge: like threshers, one and all,
Of a reek with laying down the law in a furnace. Why?
Because their lungs breathed flame—the regular crowd forbye—
From gentry pouring in—quite a nosegay, to be sure!
How else could they pass the time, six mortal hours endure
Till night should extinguish day, when matters might haply mend?
Meanwhile no bad resource was—watching begin and end
Some trial for life and death, in a brisk five minutes' space,
And betting which knave would 'scape, which hang, from his sort of face.

So, their Lordships toiled and moiled, and a deal of work was done
(I warrant) to justify the mirth of the crazy sun
As this and t'other lout, struck dumb at the sudden show
Of red robes and white wigs, boggled nor answered "Boh!"
When asked why he, Tom Styles, should not —because Jack Nokes
Had stolen the horse—be hanged: for Judges must have their jokes,
And louts must make allowance—let's say, for some blue fly
Which punctured a dewy scalp where the frizzles stuck awry—
Else Tom had fleered scot-free, so nearly over and done
Was the main of the job. Full-measure, the gentles enjoyed their fun,
As a twenty-five were tried, rank puritans caught at prayer
In a cow-house and laid by the heels,—have at 'em, devil may care!—
And ten were prescribed the whip, and ten a brand on the cheek,
And five a slit of the nose—just leaving enough to tweak.

Well, things at jolly high-tide, amusement steeped in fire,
While noon smote fierce the roof's red tiles to heart's desire,
The Court a-simmer with smoke, one ferment of oozy flesh,
One spirituous humming musk mount-mounting until its mesh
Entoiled all heads in a fluster, and Serjeant Postlethwayte
—Dashing the wig oblique as he mopped his oily pate—
Cried "Silence, or I grow grease! No loophole lets in air?
Jurymen,—Guilty, Death! Gainsay me if you dare!"
—Things at this pitch, I say,—what hubbub without the doors?
What laughs, shrieks, hoots and yells, what rudest of uproars?

Bounce through the barrier throng a bulk comes rolling vast!
Thumps, kicks,—no manner of use!—spite of them rolls at last

Into the midst a ball which, bursting, brings to view
Publican Black Ned Bratts and Tabby his big wife too:
Both in a muck-sweat, both . . . were never such eyes uplift
At the sight of yawning hell, such nostrils—snouts that sniffed
Sulphur, such mouths a-gape ready to swallow flame!
Horrified, hideous, frank fiend-faces! yet, all the same,
Mixed with a certain . . . eh? how shall I dare style—mirth
The desperate grin of the guess that, could they break from earth,
Heaven was above, and hell might rage in impotence
Below the saved, the saved!

"Confound you! (no offence!)
Out of our way,—push, wife! Yonder their Worships be!"
Ned Bratts has reached the bar, and "Hey, my Lords," roars he,
"A Jury of life and death, Judges the prime of the land,
Constables, javelineers,—all met, if I understand,
To decide so knotty a point as whether 'twas Jack or Joan
Robbed the henroost, pinched the pig, hit the King's Arms with a stone,
Dropped the baby down the well, left the tithesman in the lurch,
Or, three whole Sundays running, not once attended church!
What a pother—do these deserve the parish-stocks or whip,
More or less brow to brand, much or little nose to snip,—
When, in our Public, plain stand we—that's we stand here,
I and my Tab, brass-bold, brick-built of beef and beer,
—Do not we, slut? Step forth and show your beauty, jade!
Wife of my bosom—that's the word now! What a trade
We drove! None said us nay: nobody loved his life
So little as wag a tongue against us,—did they, wife?
Yet they knew us all the while, in their hearts, for what we are
—Worst couple, rogue and quean, unhanged—search near and far!
Eh, Tab? The pedlar, now—o'er his noggin—who warned a mate
To cut and run, nor risk his pack where its loss of weight
Was the least to dread,—aha, how we two laughed a-good
As, stealing round the midden, he came on where I stood
With billet poised and raised,—you, ready with the rope,—
Ah, but that's past, that's sin repented of, we hope!
Men knew us for that same, yet safe and sound stood we!
The lily-livered knaves knew too (I've baulked a d——)
Our keeping the 'Pied Bull' was just a mere pretence:
Too slow the pounds make food, drink, lodging, from out the pence!
There's not a stoppage to travel has chanced, this ten long year,
No break into hall or grange, no lifting of nag or steer,
Not a single roguery, from the clipping of a purse
To the cutting of a throat, but paid us toll. Od's curse!
When Gipsy Smouch made bold to cheat us of our due,
—Eh, Tab? the Squire's strong-box we helped the rascal to—
I think he pulled a face, next Sessions' swinging-time!
He danced the jig that needs no floor,—and, here's the prime,
'Twas Scroggs that houghed the mare! Ay, those were busy days!

"Well, there we flourished brave, like scripture-trees called bays,
Faring high, drinking hard, in money up to head
—Not to say, boots and shoes, when . . . Zounds, I nearly said—
Lord, to unlearn one's language! How shall we labour, wife?
Have you, fast hold, the Book? Grasp, grip it, for your life!
See, sirs, here's life, salvation! Here's—hold but out my breath—
When did I speak so long without once swearing? 'Sdeath,
No, nor unhelped by ale since man and boy! And yet
All yesterday I had to keep my whistle wet
While reading Tab this Book: book? don't say 'book'—they're plays,
Songs, ballads and the like: here's no such strawy blaze,
But sky wide ope, sun, moon, and seven stars out full-flare!
Tab, help and tell! I'm hoarse. A mug! or—no, a prayer!
Dip for one out of the Book! Who wrote it in the Jail
—He plied his pen unhelped by beer, sirs, I'll be bail!

"I've got my second wind. In trundles she —that's Tab.
'Why, Gammer, what's come now, that—bobbing like a crab
On Yule-tide bowl—your head's a-work and both your eyes
Break loose? Afeard, you fool? As if the dead can rise!
Say—Bagman Dick was found last May with fuddling-cap
Stuffed in his mouth: to choke's a natural mishap!'
'Gaffer, be—blessed,' cries she, 'and Bagman Dick as well!
I, you, and he are damned: this Public is our hell:
We live in fire: live coals don't feel!—once quenched, they learn—
Cinders do, to what dust they moulder while they burn!'

"'If you don't speak straight out,' says I—belike I swore—
'A knobstick, well you know the taste of, shall, once more,
Teach you to talk, my maid!' She ups with such a face,
Heart sunk inside me. 'Well, pad on, my prate-apace!'

"'I've been about those laces we need for . . . never mind!
If henceforth they tie hands, 'tis mine they'll have to bind.
You know who makes them best—the Tinker in our cage,
Pulled-up for gospelling, twelve years ago: no age
To try another trade,—yet, so he scorned to take
Money he did not earn, he taught himself the make
Of laces, tagged and tough—Dick Bagman found them so!
Good customers were we! Well, last week, you must know
His girl,—the blind young chit, who hawks about his wares,—
She takes it in her head to come no more—such airs
These hussies have! Yet, since we need a stoutish lace,—
"I'll to the jail-bird father, abuse her to his face!"
So, first I filled a jug to give me heart, and then,
Primed to the proper pitch, I posted to their den—
Patmore—they style their prison! I tip the turnkey, catch
My heart up, fix my face, and fearless lift the latch—
Both arms a-kimbo, in bounce with a good round oath
Ready for rapping out: no "Lawks" nor "By my troth!"

"'There sat my man, the father. He looked up: what one feels
When heart that leapt to mouth drops down again to heels!

He raised his hand . . . Hast seen, when drinking out the night,
And in, the day, earth grow another something quite
Under the sun's first stare? I stood a very stone.

" " "Woman!" (a fiery tear he put in every tone),
"How should my child frequent your house where lust is sport,
Violence—trade? Too true! I trust no vague report.
Her angel's hand, which stops the sight of sin, leaves clear
The other gate of sense, lets outrage through the ear.
What has she heard!—which, heard shall never be again.
Better lack food than feast, a Dives in the—wain
Or reign or train—of Charles!" (His language was not ours:
'Tis my belief, God spoke: no tinker has such powers).
"Bread, only bread they bring—my laces: if we broke
Your lump of leavened sin, the loaf's first crumb would choke!"

" 'Down on my marrow-bones! Then all at once rose he:
His brown hair burst a-spread, his eyes were suns to see:
Up went his hands: "Through flesh, I reach, I read thy soul!
So may some stricken tree look blasted, bough and bole,
Champed by the fire-tooth, charred without, and yet, thrice-bound
With dreriment about, within may life be found,
A prisoned power to branch and blossom as before,
Could but the gardener cleave the cloister, reach the core,
Loosen the vital sap: yet where shall help be found?
Who says 'How save it?'—nor 'Why cumbers it the ground?'
Woman, that tree art thou! All sloughed about with scurf,
Thy stag-horns fright the sky, thy snake-roots sting the turf!
Drunkenness, wantonness, theft, murder gnash and gnarl
Thine outward, case thy soul with coating like the marle
Satan stamps flat upon each head beneath his hoof!
And how deliver such? The strong men keep aloof,
Lover and friend stand far, the mocking ones pass by,
Tophet gapes wide for prey: lost soul, despair and die!
What then? 'Look unto me and be ye saved!' saith God:
'I strike the rock, outstreats the life-stream at my rod!
Be your sins scarlet, wool shall they seem like,—although
As crimson red, yet turn white as the driven snow!'"

" 'There, there, there! All I seem to somehow understand
Is—that, if I reached home, 'twas through the guiding hand
Of his blind girl which led and led me through the streets
And out of town and up to door again. What greets
First thing my eye, as limbs recover from their swoon?
A book—this Book she gave at parting. "Father's boon—
The Book he wrote: it reads as if he spoke himself:
He cannot preach in bonds, so,—take it down from shelf
When you want counsel,—think you hear his very voice!"

" 'Wicked dear Husband, first despair and then rejoice!

Dear wicked Husband, waste no tick of moment more,
Be saved like me, bald trunk! There's greenness yet at core,
Sap under slough! Read, read!'

"Let me take breath, my lords!
I'd like to know, are these—hers, mine, or Bunyan's words?
I'm 'wildered—scarce with drink,—nowise with drink alone!
You'll say, with heat: but heat's no stuff to split a stone
Like this black boulder—this flint heart of mine: the Book—
That dealt the crashing blow! Sirs, here's the fist that shook
His beard till Wrestler Jem howled like a just-lugged bear!
You had brained me with a feather: at once I grew aware
Christmas was meant for me. A burden at your back,
Good Master Christmas? Nay,—yours was that Joseph's sack,
—Or whose it was,—which held the cup,—compared with mine!
Robbery loads my loins, perjury cracks my chine,
Adultery . . . nay, Tab, you pitched me as I flung!
One word, I'll up with fist . . . No, sweet spouse, hold your tongue!

"I'm hasting to the end. The Book, sirs—take and read!
You have my history in a nutshell,—ay, indeed!
It must off, my burden! See,—slack straps and into pit,
Roll, reach the bottom, rest, rot there—a plague on it!
For a mountain's sure to fall and bury Bedford Town,
'Destruction'—that's the name, and fire shall burn it down!
O 'scape the wrath in time! Time's now, if not too late.
How can I pilgrimage up to the wicket-gate?
Next comes Despond the slough: not that I fear to pull
Through mud, and dry my clothes at brave House Beautiful—
But it's late in the day, I reckon: had I left years ago
Town, wife, and children dear . . . Well, Christmas did, you know!—
Soon I had met in the valley and tried my cudgel's strength
On the enemy horned and winged, a-straddle across its length!
Have at his horns, thwick—thwack: they snap, see! Hoof and hoof—
Bang, break the fetlock-bones! For love's sake, keep aloof
Angels! I'm man and match,—this cudgel for my flail,—
To thresh him, hoofs and horns, bat's wing and serpent's tail!
A chance gone by! But then, what else does Hopeful ding
Into the deafest ear except—hope, hope's the thing?
Too late i' the day for me to thrid the windings: but
There's still a way to win the race by death's short cut!
Did Master Faithful need climb the Delightful Mounts?
No, straight to Vanity Fair,—a fair, by all accounts,
Such as is held outside,—lords, ladies, grand and gay,—
Says he in the face of them, just what you hear me say.
And the Judges brought him in guilty, and brought him out
To die in the market-place—St. Peter's Green's about
The same thing: there they flogged, flayed, buffeted, lanced with knives,
Pricked him with swords,—I'll swear, he'd full a cat's nine lives,—
So to his end at last came Faithful,—ha, ha, he!
Who holds the highest card? for there stands hid, you see,

Behind the rabble-rout, a chariot, pair and all:
He's in, he's off, he's up, through clouds, at
trumpet-call,
Carried the nearest way to Heaven-gate! Odds my life—
Has nobody a sword to spare? not even a knife?
Then hang me, draw and quarter! Tab—do the same by her!
O Master Worldly-Wiseman . . . that's Master Interpreter,
Take the will, not the deed! Our gibbet's handy close:
Forestall Last Judgment-Day! Be kindly, not morose!
There wants no earthly judge-and-jurying: here we stand—
Sentence our guilty selves: so, hang us out of hand!
Make haste for pity's sake! A single moment's loss
Means—Satan's lord once more: his whisper shoots across
All singing in my heart, all praying in my brain,
'It comes of heat and beer!'—hark how he guffaws plain!
'To-morrow you'll wake bright, and, in a safe skin, hug
Your sound selves, Tab and you, over a foaming jug!
You've had such qualms before, time out of mind!' He's right!
Did not we kick and cuff and curse away, that night
When home we blindly reeled, and left poor humpback Joe
I' the lurch to pay for what . . . somebody did, you know!
Both of us maundered then 'Lame humpback, —never more
Will he come limping, drain his tankard at our door!
He'll swing, while—somebody . . . ' Says Tab, 'No, for I'll peach!'
'I'm for you, Tab,' cries I, 'there's rope enough for each!'
So blubbered we, and bussed, and went to bed upon
The grace of Tab's good thought: by morning, all was gone!
We laughed—'What's life to him, a cripple of no account?'
Oh, waves increase around—I feel them mount and mount!
Hang us! To-morrow brings Tom Bearward with his bears:
One new black-muzzled brute beats Sackerson, he swears:
(Sackerson, for my money!) And, baiting o'er, the Brawl
They lead on Turner's Patch,—lads, lasses, up tails all,—
I'm i' the thick o' the throng! That means the Iron Cage,
—Means the Lost Man inside! Where's hope for such as wage
War against light? Light's left, light's here, I hold light still,
So does Tab—make but haste to hang us both! You will?"

I promise, when he stopped you might have heard a mouse
Squeak, such a death-like hush sealed up the old Mote House.
But when the mass of man sank meek upon his knees,
While Tab, alongside, wheezed a hoarse "Do hang us, please!"
Why, then the waters rose, no eye but ran with tears,
Hearts heaved, heads thumped, until, paying all past arrears
Of pity and sorrow, at last a regular scream outbroke
Of triumph, joy and praise.

My Lord Chief Justice spoke,
First mopping brow and cheek, where still, for one that budged,
Another bead broke fresh: "What Judge, that ever judged
Since first the world began, judged such a case as this?
Why, Master Bratts, long since, folk smelt you out, I wis!

I had my doubts, i' faith, each time you played the fox
Convicting geese of crime in yonder witness-box—
Yea, much did I misdoubt, the thief that stole her eggs
Was hardly goosey's self at Reynard's game, i' feggs!
Yet thus much was to praise—you spoke to point, direct—
Swore you heard, saw the theft: no jury could suspect—
Dared to suspect,—I'll say,—a spot in white so clear:
Goosey was throttled, true: but thereof godly fear
Came of example set, much as our laws intend;
And, though a fox confessed, you proved the Judge's friend.
What if I had my doubts? Suppose I gave them breath,
Brought you to bar: what work to do, ere 'Guilty, Death,'—
Had paid our pains! What heaps of witnesses to drag
From holes and corners, paid from out the County's bag!
Trial three dog-days long! *Amicus Curiæ*—that's
Your title, no dispute—truth-telling Master Bratts!
Thank you, too, Mistress Tab! Why doubt one word you say?
Hanging you both deserve, hanged both shall be this day!
The tinker needs must be a proper man. I've heard
He lies in Jail long since: if Quality's good word
Warrants me letting loose,—some householder, I mean—
Freeholder, better still,—I don't say but—between
Now and next Sessions . . . Well! Consider of his case,
I promise to, at least: we owe him so much grace.
Not that—no, God forbid!—I lean to think, as you,
The grace that such repent is any jail-bird's due:
I rather see the fruit of twelve years' pious reign—
Astræa Redux, Charles restored his rights again!
—Of which, another time! I somehow feel a peace
Stealing across the world. May deeds like this increase!
So, Master Sheriff, stay that sentence I pronounced
On those two dozen odd: deserving to be trounced
Soundly, and yet . . . well, well, at all events despatch
This pair of—shall I say, sinner-saints?—ere we catch
Their jail-distemper too. Stop tears, or I'll indite
All weeping Bedfordshire for turning Bunyanite!"

So, forms were galloped through. If Justice, on the spur,
Proved somewhat expeditious, would Quality demur?
And happily hanged were they,—why lengthen out my tale?—
Where Bunyan's Statue stands facing where stood his Jail.

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

SECOND SERIES.

1880.

"You are sick, that's sure"—they say:
"Sick of what?"—they disagree.
"'Tis the brain"—thinks Doctor A;
"'Tis the heart"—holds Doctor B;
"The liver—my life I'd lay!"
"The lungs!" "The lights!"
Ah me!

So ignorant of man's whole
Of bodily organs plain to see—
So sage and certain, frank and free,
About what's under lock and key—
Man's soul!

ECHETLOS.

["The holder of the ploughshare," a gigantic figure noticeable during the fight at Marathon slaying the Persians with a ploughshare. After the fight was over the figure was seen no more.]

Here is a story shall stir you! Stand up, Greeks dead and gone,
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on,
Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was Marathon!

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought away
In his tribe and file: up, back, out, down—was the spear-arm play:
Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing that day!

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,
As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the rear,
Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he! but, a goat-skin all his wear,
Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and bare,
Went he ploughing on and on: he pushed with a ploughman's share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the shark
Precipitates his bulk? Did the right-wing halt when, stark
On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch?[1]

Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,
As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh, —look far and wide
From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-plashed seaside,—

[1] General. The commander at Marathon was Miltiades, but Kallimachos had presided at the preliminary council of war and given his casting vote in favour of fighting.

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs
thonged and brown,
Shearing and clearing still with the share
before which—down
To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed
for Greece, that clown!

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name
at all!
Say but just this: 'We praise one helpful
whom we call
The Holder of the Ploughshare.' The great
deed ne'er grows small."

Not the great name! Sing—woe for the
great name Miltiadés
And its end at Paros isle! Woe for The-
mistokles
—Satrap in Sardis court! Name not the
clown like these!

CLIVE.

[The famous Robert Clive was born, 1725, in Shropshire. He suffered greatly from low spirits, and twice attempted his life before he had attained manhood. His career in India is well known from Macaulay's Essay. He fought the battle of Plassy in 1757. He was impeached for various malfeasances, but acquitted. He killed himself in 1774.]

I AND Clive were friends—and why not?
Friends! I think you laugh, my lad.
Clive it was gave England India, while your
father gives—egad,
England nothing but the graceless boy who
lures him on to speak—
"Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades—"
with a tongue thrust in your cheek!
Very true: in my eyes, your eyes, all the
world's eyes, Clive was man,
I was, am and ever shall be—mouse, nay,
mouse of all its clan
Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen's
estimate for fame;
While the man Clive—he fought Plassy,
spoiled the clever foreign game,
Conquered and annexed and Englished!

Never mind! As o'er my punch
(You away) I sit of evenings,—silence, save
for biscuit-crunch,
Black, unbroken,—thought grows busy, thrids
each pathway of old years,
Notes this forthright, that meander, till the
long-past life appears
Like an outspread map of country plodded
through, each mile and rood,
Once, and well remembered still: I'm startled
in my solitude
Ever and anon by—what's the sudden mock-
ing light that breaks
On me as I slap the table till no rummer-
glass but shakes
While I ask—aloud, I do believe, God help
me!—"Was it thus?
Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when
just one step for us—"
(Us,—you were not born, I grant, but surely
some day born would be)
"—One bold step had gained a province"
(figurative talk, you see)
"Got no end of wealth and honour,—yet I
stood stock still no less?"
—"For I was not Clive," you com-
ment: but it needs no Clive to
guess
Wealth were handy, honour ticklish, did no
writing on the wall
Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!"
Him who braves that notice—call
Hero! none of such heroics suit myself who
read plain words,
Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture
says the land's the Lord's:
Louts then—what avail the thousand, noisy
in a smock-frocked ring,
All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence,
be Clive their king?
Higher warrant must you show me ere I set
one foot before
T'other in that dark direction, though I stand
for evermore
Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore?
No! By-and-by
Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns
out less wise than I.

Don't object "Why call him friend, then?"
Power is power, my boy, and still
Marks a man,—God's gift magnific, exercised for good or ill.
You've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was a tiger's skin:
Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in!
True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came to pass;
Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage—ah, the brute he was!
Why, that Clive,—that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-driving clerk, in fine,—
He sustained a siege in Arcot. . . . But the world knows! Pass the wine.

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh, you mentioned "fear"!
Just so: and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I: so, when the clouds, about the orb
Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely, threatened to absorb
Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,—friendship might, with steadier eye
Drawing near, bear what had burned else, now no blaze—all majesty.
Too much bee's-wing floats my figure? Well, suppose a castle's new:
None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold sure for shoe
'Twixt those squares and squares of granite plating the impervious pile
As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile.
Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled? From without
Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates about
Towers—the heap he kicks now! turrets—just the measure of his cane!
Will that do? Observe moreover—(same similitude again)—
Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of cannonade:
'Tis when foes are foiled and fighting's finished that vile rains invade,
Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating find no holes
Fit to build in like the topmost sockets made for banner-poles.
So Clive crumbled slow in London—crashed at last.

A week before,
Dining with him,—after trying churchyard-chat of days of yore,—
Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece, foot-piece, when they lean
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a coffined Past between.
As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extinguishment
By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers went
Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,—"One more throw
Try for Clive!" thought I: "Let's venture some good rattling question!" So—
"Come, Clive, tell us"—out I blurted—"what to tell in turn, years hence,
When my boy—suppose I have one—asks me on what evidence
I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit
Worth your Alexanders, Cæsars, Marlboroughs and—what said Pitt?—
Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once"—I want to say—
"Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell away
—In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob's rough guess—
Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called courageousness!
Come! what moment of the minute, what speck-centre in the wide
Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified?

(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this wholesome Port !)
If a friend has leave to question,—when were you most brave, in short ? "

Up he arched his brows o' the instant—formidably Clive again.
"When was I most brave ? I'd answer, were the instance half as plain
As another instance that's a brain-lodged crystal—curse it !—here
Freezing when my memory touches—ugh !—the time I felt most fear.
Ugh ! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear—anyhow,
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver now."

" Fear ! " smiled I. " Well, that's the rarer: that's a specimen to seek,
Ticket up in one's museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive's Fear, Unique !* "

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he pored as though
Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts encrusted long ago.
When he spoke 'twas like a lawyer reading word by word some will,
Some blind jungle of a statement,—beating on and on until
Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

" This fell in my factor-days.
Desk-drudge, slaving at St. David's, one must game, or drink, or craze.
I chose gaming : and,—because your high-flown gamesters hardly take
Umbrage at a factor's elbow if the factor pays his stake,—
I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice,
Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud of voice,
Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile
Who not merely risked but lost his hard-earned guineas with a smile.

" Down I sat to cards, one evening,—had for my antagonist
Somebody whose name's a secret—you'll know why—so, if you list,
Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from head to heel !
Play commenced : and, whether Cocky fancied that a clerk must feel
Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green baize,
I the scribe with him the warrior,—guessed no penman dared to raise
Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing end
More or less abruptly,—whether disinclined he grew to spend
Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare
At—not ask of—lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide plays fair,—
Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me ' Cut ! '

" I rose.
' Such the new manœuvre, Captain ? I'm a novice : knowledge grows.
What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir ? '

" Never did a thunder-clap
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his lap,
As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join the pack)
Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before, turned black.

When he found his voice, he stammered ' That expression once again ! '

" ' Well, you forced a card and cheated ! '

" ' Possibly a factor's brain,
Busied with his all-important balance of accounts, may deem
Weighing words superfluous trouble : *cheat* to clerkly ears may seem

Just the joke for friends to venture: but we
are not friends, you see!
When a gentleman is joked with,—if he's
good at repartee,
He rejoins, as do I—Sirrah, on your knees,
withdraw in full!
Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet
through your skull
Lets in light and teaches manners to what
brain it finds! Choose quick—
Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray
me trim yon candle-wick!'

"'Well, you cheated!'
"Then outbroke a
howl from all the friends around.
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were
clenched and teeth were ground.
End it! no time like the present! Captain,
yours were our disgrace!
No delay, begin and finish! Stand back,
leave the pair a space!
Let civilians be instructed: henceforth simply
ply the pen,
Fly the sword! This clerk's no swordsman?
Suit him with a pistol, then!
Even odds! A dozen paces 'twixt the most
and least expert
Make a dwarf a giant's equal: nay, the
dwarf, if he's alert,
Likelier hits the broader target!'

"Up we stood accordingly.
As they handed me the weapon, such was
my soul's thirst to try
Then and there conclusions with this bully,
tread on and stamp out
Every spark of his existence, that,—crept
close to, curled about
By that toying tempting teasing fool-fore-
finger's middle joint,—
Don't you guess?—the trigger yielded. Gone
my chance! and at the point
Of such prime success moreover: scarce an
inch above his head
Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was
living, I was dead.

"Up he marched in flaming triumph—'twas
his right, mind!—up, within
Just an arm's length. 'Now, my clerkling,'
chuckled Cocky with a grin
As the levelled piece quite touched me,
'Now, Sir Counting-House, re-
peat
That expression which I told you proved bad
manners! Did I cheat?'

"'Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and,
this moment, know as well.
As for me, my homely breeding bids you—
fire and go to Hell!'

"Twice the muzzle touched my forehead.
Heavy barrel, flurried wrist,
Either spoils a steady lifting. Thrice: then,
'Laugh at Hell who list,
I can't! God's no fable either. Did this
boy's eye wink once? No!
There's no standing him and Hell and God
all three against me,—so,
I did cheat!'

"And down he threw the pistol,
out rushed—by the door
Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney,
roof or floor,
He effected disappearance—I'll engage no
glance was sent
That way by a single starer, such a blank
astonishment
Swallowed up their senses: as for speaking—
mute they stood as mice.

"Mute not long, though! Such reaction,
such a hubbub in a trice!
'Rogue and rascal! Who'd have thought it?
What's to be expected next,
When His Majesty's Commission serves a
sharper as pretext
For . . . But where's the need of wasting
time now? Nought requires delay:
Punishment the Service cries for: let disgrace
be wiped away

Publicly, in good broad daylight! Resignation? No, indeed
Drum and fife must play the Rogue's March, rank and file be free to speed
Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the rear
—Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,—never fear,
Mister Clive, for—though a clerk—you bore yourself—suppose we say—
Just as would beseem a soldier!'

"'Gentlemen, attention—pray!
First, one word!'

"I passed each speaker severally in review.
When I had precise their number, names and styles, and fully knew
Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,—why, then——

"'Some five minutes since, my life lay—as you all saw, gentlemen—
At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice was raised
In arrest of judgment, not one tongue—before my powder blazed—
Ventured "Can it be the youngster blundered, really seemed to mark
Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,
Guess at random,—still, for sake of fair play—what if for a freak,
In a fit of absence,—such things have been!—if our friend proved weak
—What's the phrase?—corrected fortune! Look into the case, at least!"
Who dared interpose between the altar's victim and the priest?
Yet he spared me! You eleven! Whosoever, all or each,
To the disadvantage of the man who spared me, utters speech
—To his face, behind his back,—that speaker has to do with me:
Me who promise, if positions change and mine the chance should be,
Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage!'

"Twenty-five
Years ago this matter happened: and 'tis certain," added Clive,
"Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single breath
Breathed against him: lips were closed throughout his life, or since his death,
For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.
All I know is—Cocky had one chance more; how he used it,—grew
Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again
Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his train,—
That's for you to judge. Reprieval I procured, at any rate.
Ugh—the memory of that minute's fear makes gooseflesh rise! Why prate
Longer? You've my story, there's your instance: fear I did, you see!"

"Well"—I hardly kept from laughing—"if I see it, thanks must be
Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that—in a common case—
When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's face,
I should underrate, believe me, such a trial to the nerve!
'Tis no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor swerve.
Fear I naturally look for—unless, of all men alive,
I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert Clive.
Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death—the whole world knows—
Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,
Clive and I, you had not wondered—up he sprang so, out he rapped
Such a round of oaths—no matter! I'll endeavour to adapt
To our modern usage words he—well, 'twas friendly licence—flung
At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his tongue.

"You—a soldier? You—at Plassy? Yours the faculty to nick
Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-quick,
—At his mercy, at his malice,—has you, through some stupid inch
Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,—not to flinch
—That needs courage, you'll concede me. Then, look here! Suppose the man,
Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span
Distant from my temple,—curse him!—quietly had bade me 'There!
Keep your life, calumniator!—worthless life I freely spare:
Mine you freely would have taken—murdered me and my good fame
Both at once—and all the better! Go, and thank your own bad aim
Which permits me to forgive you! What if, with such words as these,
He had cast away his weapon? How should I have borne me, please?
Nay, I'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only this, remained—
Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. I so had gained
Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still
Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's will."

"Such the turn," said I, "the matter takes with you? Then I abate
—No, by not one jot nor tittle,—of your act my estimate.
Fear—I wish I could detect there: courage fronts me, plain enough—
Call it desperation, madness—never mind! for here's in rough
Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome disgrace.
True, disgrace were hard to bear: but such a rush against God's face
—None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church at times,
Say the creed my mother taught me! Many years in foreign climes
Rub some marks away—not all, though! We poor sinners reach life's brink,
Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but think
There's advantage in what's left us—ground to stand on, time to call
'Lord, have mercy!' ere we topple over—do not leap, that's all!"

Oh, he made no answer,—re-absorbed into his cloud. I caught
Something like "Yes—courage: only fools will call it fear."
If aught
Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I heard,
Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and uttered just the word
"Fearfully courageous!"—this, be sure, and nothing else I groaned.
I'm no Clive, nor parson either: Clive's worst deed—we'll hope condoned.

MULÉYKEH.

If a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A churl's!"
Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"
—"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn
More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking pearls,

—Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán?
They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the due,
Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began,
Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,
And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at men's land and gold!'

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—and right, I say.
Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Outstripping all,
Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor's staff.
Who started, the owner's hope, gets shamed and named, that day.
'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we use to call
Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hóseyn, I say, to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies: "Be sure
On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away in heart
For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no cure.
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an oath,
'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize apart.'"

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to Hóseyn's tent,
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace!" bids he.

"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty shall mend the wrong.
'Tis said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred camels spent
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such prudence is far from me
Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley may last too long."

Said Hóseyn "You feed young beasts a many, of famous breed,
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Múzennem:
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs the hill.
But I love Muléykeh's face: her forefront whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels—go gaze on them!
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.
"You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a very prince.
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare your simple gift!
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my wife prompts 'Fool,
Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the rewarder, since
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders on Him shows thrift.'"

Said Hóseyn "God gives each man one life, like a lamp, then gives
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted—hold high, wave wide
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what help is left?
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Muléykeh lives.
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died?
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-bereft?"

Another year, and—hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?
He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,
But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench
Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night combines
With the robber—and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to crime,
Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my store,
And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?
Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one!
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay, more—
For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two:
I will beg! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and son.

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,
And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die:
Let him die, then,—let me live! Be bold—but not too rash!
I have found me a peeping-place: breast, bury your breathing while
I explore for myself! Now, breathe! He deceived me not, the spy!

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy! Beside
Stands tethered the Pearl: thrice winds her headstall about his wrist:
'Tis therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the roof reveals.
And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and wide,
Buhéyseh, her sister born: fleet is she yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case some thief
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.
What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once mount her we both escape."
Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a serpent disturbs no leaf
In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest: clean through,
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned, he performs the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth, has clipped
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound as before,
He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like bolt from bow.
Up starts our plundered man: from his breast though the heart be ripped,
Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a minute more,
He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose worth we know!

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long since to ride,
And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining fast
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be spied!
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and queer:
Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and must

Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—joy ! fear !
What folly makes Hóseyn shout "Dog Duhl, Damned son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's left flank !"

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt perceived
Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for evermore.
And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may :
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping : and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-Asád
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his grief ;
And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound
His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad !
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all : "Poor Hóseyn is crazed past hope !
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite ?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night !"—
"And the beaten in speed !" wept Hóseyn : "You never have loved my Pearl."

PIETRO OF ABANO.

[An Italian physician, born 1246, died 1320. Professor of Medicine at Padua. Accused of the black arts, but died in time to avoid being burnt. A voluminous author on occult and semi-scientific subjects.]

Petrus Aponensis—there was a magician !
When that strange adventure happened, which I mean to tell my hearers,
Nearly had he tried all trades — beside physician,
Architect, astronomer, astrologer,—or worse :
How else, as the old books warrant, was he able,
All at once, through all the world, to prove the promptest of appearers
Where was prince to cure, tower to build as high as Babel,
Star to name or sky-sign read,—yet pouch, for pains, a curse ?

—Curse : for when a vagrant,—foot-sore travel-tattered,
Now a young man, now an old man, Turk or Arab, Jew or Gipsy,—
Proffered folk in passing—O for pay, what mattered ?—
"I'll be doctor, I'll play builder, star I'll name—sign read !"
Soon as prince was cured, tower built, and fate predicted,
"Who may you be ?" came the question ; when he answered, "*Petrus ipse*,"
"Just as we divined !" cried folk—"A wretch convicted
Long ago of dealing with the devil—you indeed !"

So, they cursed him roundly, all his labour's payment,
Motioned him—the convalescent prince would —to vacate the presence :
Babylonians plucked his beard and tore his raiment,
Drove him from that tower he built : while, had he peered at stars,

Town howled "Stone the quack who styles
our Dog-star—Sirius!"
Country yelled "Aroint the churl who pro-
phesies we take no pleasance
Under vine and fig-tree, since the year's
delirious,
Bears no crop of any kind,—all through the
planet Mars!"

Straightway would the whilom youngster
grow a grisard,
Or, as case might hap, the hoary eld drop
off and show a stripling.
Town and country groaned—indebted to a
wizard!
"Curse—nay, kick and cuff him—fit requital
of his pains!
Gratitude in word or deed were wasted truly!
Rather make the Church amends by crying
out on, cramping, crippling
One who, on pretence of serving man, serves
duly
Man's arch foe: not ours, be sure, but
Satan's—his the gains!"

Peter grinned and bore it, such disgraceful
usage:
Somehow, cuffs and kicks and curses seem
ordained his like to suffer:
Prophet's pay with Christians, now as in the
Jews' age,
Still is—stoning: so, he meekly took his wage
and went,
—Safe again was found ensconced in those
old quarters,
Padua's blackest blindest by-street,—none
the worse, nay, somewhat tougher:
"Calculating," quoth he, "soon I join the
martyrs,
Since, who magnify my lore on burning me
are bent."[1]

[1] "Studiando le mie cifre col compasso,
Rilevo che sarò presto sotterra,
Perchè del mio saper si fa gran chiasso,
E gl' ignoranti m' hanno mosso
guerra."

Said to have been found in a well at Abano in
the last century. They were extemporaneously

Therefore, on a certain evening, to his
alley
Peter slunk, all bruised and broken, sore in
body, sick in spirit,
Just escaped from Cairo where he launched
a galley
Needing neither sails nor oars nor help of
wind or tide,
—Needing but the fume of fire to set
a-flying
Wheels like mad which whirled you quick
—North, South, where'er you pleased
require it,—
That is—would have done so had not priests
come prying,
Broke his engine up and bastinadoed him
beside.

As he reached his lodging, stopped there
unmolested,
(Neighbours feared him, urchins fled him,
few were bold enough to follow)
While his fumbling fingers tried the lock and
tested
Once again the queer key's virtue, oped the
sullen door,—
Someone plucked his sleeve, cried "Master,
pray your pardon!
Grant a word to me who patient wait you in
your archway's hollow!
Hard on you men's hearts are: be not your
heart hard on
Me who kiss your garment's hem, O Lord of
magic lore!

"Mage—say I, who no less, scorning tittle-
tattle,
To the vulgar give no credence when they
prate of Peter's magic,
Deem his art brews tempest, hurts the crops
and cattle,

Englished thus: not as Father Prout chose to
prefer them:—

Studying my ciphers with the compass,
I reckon—I soon shall be below-ground;
Because of my lore folk make great rumpus,
And war on myself makes each dull rogue
round.—R. B.

Hinders fowls from laying eggs and worms
from spinning silk,
Rides upon a he-goat, mounts at need a
broomstick:
While the price he pays for this (so turns to
comic what was tragic)
Is—he may not drink—dreads like the Day
of Doom's tick—
One poor drop of sustenance ordained mere
men—that's milk!

"Tell such tales to Padua! Think me no
such dullard!
Not from these benighted parts did I derive
my breath and being!
I am from a land whose cloudless skies are
coloured
Livelier, suns orb largelier, airs seem incense,
—while, on earth—
What, instead of grass, our fingers and our
thumbs cull,
Proves true moly! sounds and sights there
help the body's hearing, seeing,
Till the soul grows godlike: brief,—you front
no numbscull
Shaming by ineptitude the Greece that gave
him birth!

"Mark within my eye its iris mystic-lettered—
That's my name! and note my ear—its swan-
shaped cavity, my emblem!
Mine's the swan-like nature born to fly
unfettered
Over land and sea in search of knowledge—
food for song.
Art denied the vulgar! Geese grow fat on
barley,
Swans require ethereal provend, undesirous
to resemble 'em—
Soar to seek Apollo,—favoured with a parley
Such as, Master, you grant me—who will not
hold you long.

"Leave to learn to sing—for that your swan
petitions:
Master, who possess the secret, say not nay
to such a suitor!
All I ask is—bless mine, purest of ambitions!
Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free,
and happy! How?
Just by making me—as you are mine—their
model!
Geese have goose-thoughts: make a swan
their teacher first, then co-adjutor,—
Let him introduce swan-notions to each
noddle,—
Geese will soon grow swans, and men become
what I am now!

"That's the only magic—had but fools dis-
cernment,
Could they probe and pass into the solid
through the soft and seeming!
Teach me such true magic—now and no
adjournment!
Teach your art of making fools subserve the
man of mind!
Magic is the power we men of mind should
practise,
Draw fools to become our drudges, docile
henceforth, never dreaming—
While they do our hests for fancied gain—the
fact is
What they toil and moil to get proves false-
hood: truth's behind!

"See now! you conceive some fabric—say, a
mansion
Meet for monarch's pride and pleasure: this
is truth—a thought has fired you,
Made you fain to give some cramped concept
expansion,
Put your faculty to proof, fulfil your nature's
task.
First you fascinate the monarch's self: he
fancies
He it was devised the scheme you execute as
he inspired you:
He in turn sets slaving insignificances
Toiling, moiling till your structure stands
there—all you ask!

"Soon the monarch's known for what he was
—a ninny:
Soon the rabble-rout leave labour, take their
work-day wage and vanish:

Soon the late puffed bladder, pricked, shows lank and skinny—
'Who was its inflator?' ask we, 'whose the giant lungs?'
Petri en pulmones![1] What though men prove ingrates?
Let them—so they stop at crucifixion—buffet, ban and banish!
Peter's power's apparent: human praise—its din grates
Harsh as blame on ear unused to aught save angels' tongues.

"Ay, there have been always, since our world existed,
Mages who possessed the secret—needed but to stand still, fix eye
On the foolish mortal: straight was he enlisted
Soldier, scholar, servant, slave—no matter for the style!
Only through illusion; ever what seemed profit—
Love or lucre—justified obedience to the *Ipse dixi:*
Work done—palace reared from pavement up to soffit—
Was it strange if builders smelt out cheating all the while?

"Let them pelt and pound, bruise, bray you in a mortar!
What's the odds to you who seek reward of quite another nature?
You've enrolled your name where sages of your sort are,
—Michael of Constantinople, Hans of Halberstadt!
Nay and were you nameless, still you've your conviction
You it was and only you—what signifies the nomenclature?—
Ruled the world in fact, though how you ruled be fiction
Fit for fools: true wisdom's magic you—if e'er man—had 't!

"But perhaps you ask me 'Since each ignoramus
While he profits by such magic persecutes the benefactor,
What should I expect but—once I render famous
You as Michael, Hans and Peter—just one ingrate more?
If the vulgar prove thus, whatsoe'er the pelf be,
Pouched through my beneficence—and doom me dungeoned, chained, or racked, or
Fairly burned outright—how grateful will yourself be
When, his secret gained, you match your—master just before?'

"That's where I await you! Please, revert a little!
What do folk report about you if not this—which, though chimeric,
Still, as figurative, suits you to a tittle—
That,—although the elements obey your nod and wink,
Fades or flowers the herb you chance to smile or sigh at,
While your frown bids earth quake palled by obscuration atmospheric,—
Brief, although through nature nought resists your *fiat*,
There's yet one poor substance mocks you—milk you may not drink!

"Figurative language! Take my explanation!
Fame with fear, and hate with homage, these your art procures in plenty.
All's but daily dry bread: what makes moist the ration?
Love, the milk that sweetens man his meal—alas, you lack:
I am he who, since he fears you not, can love you.
Love is born of heart not mind, *de corde natus haud de mente;*
Touch my heart and love's yours, sure as shines above you
Sun by day and star by night though earth should go to wrack!

[1] Lo! the lungs of Peter.

"Stage by stage you lift me—kiss by kiss I hallow
Whose but your dear hand my helper, punctual as at each new impulse
I approach my aim? Shell chipped, the eaglet callow
Needs a parent's pinion-push to quit the eyrie's edge:
But once fairly launched forth, denizen of æther,
While each effort sunward bids the blood more freely through each limb pulse,
Sure the parent feels, as gay they soar together,
Fully are all pains repaid when love redeems its pledge!"

Then did Peter's tristful visage lighten somewhat,
Vent a watery smile as though inveterate mistrust were thawing.
"Well, who knows?" he slow broke silence. "Mortals—come what
Come there may—are still the dupes of hope there's luck in store.
Many scholars seek me, promise mounts and marvels:
Here stand I to witness how they step 'twixt me and clapperclawing!
Dry bread,—that I've gained me: truly I should starve else:
But of milk, no drop was mine! Well, shuffle cards once more!"

At the word of promise thus implied, our stranger—
What can he but cast his arms, in rapture of embrace, round Peter?
"Hold! I choke!" the mage grunts. "Shall I in the manger
Any longer play the dog? Approach, my calf, and feed!
Bene . . . won't you wait for grace?" But sudden incense
Wool-white, serpent-solid, curled up—perfume growing sweet and sweeter
Till it reached the young man's nose and seemed to win sense
Soul and all from out his brain through nostril: yes, indeed!

Presently the young man rubbed his eyes. "Where am I?
Too much bother over books! Some reverie has proved amusing.
What did Peter prate of? 'Faith, my brow is clammy!
How my head throbs, how my heart thumps! Can it be I swooned?
Oh, I spoke my speech out—cribbed from Plato's tractate,
Dosed him with 'the Fair and Good,' swore—Dog of Egypt—I was choosing
Plato's way to serve men! What's the hour? Exact eight!
Home now, and to-morrow never mind how Plato mooned!

"Peter has the secret! Fair and Good are products
(So he said) of Foul and Evil: one must bring to pass the other.
Just as poisons grow drugs, steal through sundry odd ducts
Doctors name, and ultimately issue safe and changed.
You'd abolish poisons, treat disease with dainties
Such as suit the sound and sane? With all such kickshaws vain you pother!
Arsenic's the stuff puts force into the faint eyes,
Opium sets the brain to rights—by cark and care deranged.

"What, he's safe within door?—would escape—no question—
Thanks, since thanks and more I owe, and mean to pay in time befitting.
What most presses now is—after night's digestion,
Peter, of thy precepts!—promptest practice of the same.
Let me see! The wise man, first of all, scorns riches:
But to scorn them must obtain them: none believes in his permitting

Gold to lie ungathered: who picks up, then pitches
Gold away—philosophizes: none disputes his claim.

"So with worldly honours: 'tis by abdicating,
Incontestably he proves he could have kept the crown discarded.
Sulla cuts a figure, leaving off dictating:
Simpletons laud private life? 'The grapes are sour,' laugh we.
So, again—but why continue? All's tumultuous
Here: my head's a-whirl with knowledge. Speedily shall be rewarded
He who taught me! Greeks prove ingrates? So insult you us?
When your teaching bears its first-fruits, Peter—wait and see!"

As the word, the deed proved; ere a brief year's passage,
Fop—that fool he made the jokes on—now he made the jokes for, *gratis:*
Hunks—that hoarder, long left lonely in his crass age—
Found now one appreciative deferential friend:
Powder-paint-and-patch, Hag Jezebel—recovered,
Strange to say, the power to please, got courtship till she cried *Jam satis!*
Fop be-flattered, Hunks be-friended, Hag be-lovered—
Nobody o'erlooked, save God—he soon attained his end.

As he lounged at ease one morning in his villa,
(Hag's the dowry) estimated (Hunks' bequest) his coin in coffer,
Mused on how a fool's good word (Fop's word) could fill a
Social circle with his praise, promote him man of mark,—
All at once—"An old friend fain would see your Highness!"
There stood Peter, skeleton and scarecrow, plain writ *Phi-lo-so-pher*
In the woe-worn face—for yellowness and dryness,
Parchment—with a pair of eyes—one hope their feeble spark.

"Did I counsel rightly? Have you, in accordance,
Prospered greatly, dear my pupil? Sure, at just the stage I find you,
When your hand may draw me forth from the mad war-dance
Savages are leading round your master—down, not dead.
Padua wants to burn me: baulk them, let me linger
Life out—rueful though its remnant—hid in some safe hole behind you!
Prostrate here I lie: quick, help with but a finger
Lest I house in safety's self—a tombstone o'er my head!

"Lodging, bite and sup, with—now and then—a copper
—Alms for any poorer still, if such there be, —is all my asking.
Take me for your bedesman,—nay, if you think proper,
Menial merely,—such my perfect passion for repose!
Yes, from out your plenty Peter craves a pittance
—Leave to thaw his frozen hands before the fire whereat you're basking!
Double though your debt were, grant this boon—remittance
He proclaims of obligation: 'tis himself that owes!"

"Venerated Master—can it be, such treatment
Learning meets with, magic fails to guard you from, by all appearance?
Strange! for, as you entered,—what the famous feat meant,
I was full of,—why you reared that fabric, Padua's boast.

Nowise for man's pride, man's pleasure, did you slyly
Raise it, but man's seat of rule whereby the world should soon have clearance
(Happy world) from such a rout as now so vilely
Handles you—and hampers me, for which I grieve the most.

"Since if it got wind you now were my familiar,
How could I protect you—nay, defend myself against the rabble?
Wait until the mob, now masters, willy-nilly are
Servants as they should be: then has gratitude full play!
Surely this experience shows how unbefitting
'Tis that minds like mine should rot in ease and plenty. Geese may gabble,
Gorge, and keep the ground: but swans are soon for quitting
Earthly fare—as fain would I, your swan, if taught the way.

"Teach me, then, to rule men, have them at my pleasure!
Solely for their good, of course,—impart a secret worth rewarding,
Since the proper life's-prize! Tantalus's treasure
Aught beside proves, vanishes and leaves no trace at all.
Wait awhile, nor press for payment prematurely!
Over-haste defrauds you. Thanks! since,—even while I speak,—discarding
Sloth and vain delights, I learn how—swiftly, surely—
Magic sways the sceptre, wears the crown and wields the ball!

"Gone again—what, is he? 'Faith, he's soon disposed of!
Peter's precepts work already, put within my lump their leaven!
Ay, we needs must don glove would we pluck the rose—doff
Silken garment would we climb the tree and take its fruit.
Why sharp thorn, rough rind? To keep unviolated
Either prize! We garland us, we mount from earth to feast in heaven,
Just because exist what once we estimated
Hindrances which, better taught, as helps we now compute.

"Foolishly I turned disgusted from my fellows!
Pits of ignorance—to fill, and heaps of prejudice—to level—
Multitudes in motley, whites and blacks and yellows—
What a hopeless task it seemed to discipline the host!
Now I see my error. Vices act like virtues
—Not alone because they guard—sharp thorns—the rose we first dishevel,
Not because they scrape, scratch—rough rind—through the dirt-shoes
Bare feet cling to bole with, while the half-mooned boot we boast.

"No, my aim is nobler, more disinterested!
Man shall keep what seemed to thwart him, since it proves his true assistance,
Leads to ascertaining which head is the best head,
Would he crown his body, rule its members—lawless else.
Ignorant the horse stares, by deficient vision
Takes a man to be a monster, lets him mount, then, twice the distance
Horse could trot unridden, gallops—dream Elysian!—
Dreaming that his dwarfish guide's a giant,—jockeys tell 's."

Brief, so worked the spell, he promptly had a riddance:
Heart and brain no longer felt the pricks which passed for conscience-scruples:
Free henceforth his feet,—*Per Bacco*, how they did dance
Merrily through lets and checks that stopped the way before!

Politics the prize now,—such adroit adviser,
Opportune suggester, with the tact that triples and quadruples
Merit in each measure,—never did the Kaiser
Boast a subject such a statesman, friend, and something more!

As he, up and down, one noonday, paced his closet
—Council o'er, each spark (his hint) blown flame, by colleagues' breath applauded,
Strokes of statecraft hailed with "*Salomo si nôsset!*"
(His the nostrum) — every throw for luck come double-six,—
As he, pacing, hugged himself in satisfaction,
Thump—the door went. "What, the Kaiser? By none else were I defrauded
Thus of well-earned solace. Since 'tis fate's exaction,—
Enter, Liege my Lord! Ha, Peter, you here? *Teneor vix!*"

"Ah, Sir, none the less, contain you, nor wax irate!
You so lofty, I so lowly,—vast the space which yawns between us!
Still, methinks, you—more than ever—at a high rate
Needs must prize poor Peter's secret since it lifts you thus.
Grant me now the boon whereat before you boggled!
Ten long years your march has moved—one triumph—(though *e*'s short)—*hactēnus*,
While I down and down disastrously have joggled
Till I pitch against Death's door, the true *Nec Ultra Plus*.

"Years ago—some ten 'tis—since I sought for shelter,
Craved in your whole house a closet, out of all your means a comfort.
Now you soar above these: as is gold to spelter
So is power—you urged with reason—paramount to wealth.
Power you boast in plenty: let it grant me refuge!
Houseroom now is out of question: find for me some stronghold—some fort—
Privacy wherein, immured, shall this blind deaf huge
Monster of a mob let stay the soul I'd save by stealth!

"Ay, for all too much with magic have I tampered!
—Lost the world, and gained, I fear, a certain place I'm to describe loth!
Still, if prayer and fasting tame the pride long pampered,
Mercy may be mine: amendment never comes too late.
How can I amend beset by cursers, kickers?
Pluck this brand from out the burning! Once away, I take my Bible-oath,
Never more—so long as life's weak lamp-flame flickers—
No, not once I'll tease you, but in silence bear my fate!"

"Gently, good my Genius, Oracle unerring!
Strange now! can you guess on what—as in you peeped—it was I pondered?
You and I are both of one mind in preferring
Power to wealth, but—here's the point—what sort of power, I ask?
Ruling men is vulgar, easy and ignoble:
Rid yourself of conscience, quick you have at beck and call the fond herd.
But who wields the crozier, down may fling the crow-bill:
That's the power I covet now; soul's sway o'er souls—my task!

"'Well but,' you object, 'you have it, who by glamour
Dress up lies to look like truths, mask folly in the garb of reason:
Your soul acts on theirs, sure, when the people clamour,
Hold their peace, now fight now fondle,—earwigged through the brains.'

Possibly! but still the operation's mundane,
Grosser than a taste demands which—craving manna—kecks at peason—
Power o'er men by wants material: why should one deign
Rule by sordid hopes and fears—a grunt for all one's pains?

"No, if men must praise me, let them praise to purpose!
Would we move the world, not earth but heaven must be our fulcrum—*pou sto!*
Thus I seek to move it: Master, why intérpose—
Baulk my climbing close on what's the ladder's topmost round?
Statecraft 'tis I step from: when by priestcraft hoisted
Up to where my foot may touch the highest rung which fate allows toe,
Then indeed ask favour! On you shall be foisted
No excuse: I'll pay my debt, each penny of the pound!

"Ho, my knaves without there! Lead this worthy downstairs!
No farewell, good Paul—nay, Peter—what's your name remembered rightly?
Come, he's humble: out another would have flounced—airs
Suitors often give themselves when our sort bow them forth.
Did I touch his rags? He surely kept his distance:
Yet, there somehow passed to me from him—where'er the virtue might lie—
Something that inspires my soul—Oh, by assistance
Doubtlessly of Peter!—still, he's worth just what he's worth!

"'Tis my own soul soars now: soaring—how? By crawling!
I'll to Rome, before Rome's feet the temporal-supreme lay prostrate!
'Hands' (I'll say) 'proficient once in pulling, hauling
This and that way men as I was minded—feet now clasp!'
Ay, the Kaiser's self has wrung them in his fervour!
Now—they only sue to slave for Rome, nor at one doit the cost rate.
Rome's adopted child—no bone, no muscle, nerve or
Sinew of me but I'll strain, though out my life I gasp!"

As he stood one evening proudly—(he had traversed
Rome on horseback—peerless pageant!—claimed the Lateran as new Pope)—
Thinking "All's attained now! Pontiff! Who could have erst
Dreamed of my advance so far when, some ten years ago,
I embraced devotion, grew from priest to bishop,
Gained the Purple, bribed the Conclave, got the Two-thirds, saw my coop ope,
Came out—what Rome hails me! O were there a wish-shop,
Not one wish more would I purchase—lord of all below!

"Ha!—who dares intrude now—puts aside the arras?
What, old Peter, here again, at such a time, in such a presence?
Satan sends this plague back merely to embarrass
Me who enter on my office—little needing you!
'Faith, I'm touched myself by age, but you look Tithon!
Were it vain to seek of you the sole prize left—rejuvenescence?
Well, since flesh is grass which Time must lay his scythe on,
Say your say and so depart and make no more ado!"

Peter faltered—coughing first by way of prologue—
"Holiness, your help comes late: a death at ninety little matters.

Padua, build poor Peter's pyre now, on log roll log,
Burn away—I've lived my day! Yet here's the sting in death—
I've an author's pride: I want my Book's survival:
See, I've hid it in my breast to warm me mid the rags and tatters!
Save it—tell next age your Master had no rival!
Scholar's debt discharged in full, be 'Thanks' my latest breath!"

"Faugh, the frowsy bundle—scribblings harum-scarum
Scattered o'er a dozen sheepskins! What's the name of this farrago?
Ha—'*Conciliator Differentiarum*'—
Man and book may burn together, cause the world no loss!
Stop—what else? A tractate—eh, '*De Speciebus*
Ceremonialis Ma-gi-æ?' I dream sure! Hence, away, go,
Wizard,—quick avoid me! Vain you clasp my knee, buss
Hand that bears the Fisher's ring or foot that boasts the Cross!

"Help! The old magician clings like an octopus!
Ah, you rise now—fuming, fretting, frowning, if I read your features!
Frown, who cares? We're Pope—once Pope, you can't unpope us!
Good—you muster up a smile: that's better! Still so brisk?
All at once grown youthful? But the case is plain! Ass—
Here I dally with the fiend, yet know the Word—compels all creatures
Earthly, heavenly, hellish. *Apage, Sathanas*
Dicam verbum Salomonis—" "*—dicite!*"
When—whisk!—

What was changed? The stranger gave his eyes a rubbing:
There smiled Peter's face turned back a moment at him o'er the shoulder,
As the black door shut, bang! "So he 'scapes a drubbing!"
(Quoth a boy who, unespied, had stopped to hear the talk).
"That's the way to thank these wizards when they bid men
Benedicite! What ails you? You, a man, and yet no bolder?
Foreign Sir, you look but foolish!" "*Idmen, idmen!*"
Groaned the Greek. "O Peter, cheese at last I know from chalk!"

Peter lived his life out, menaced yet no martyr,
Knew himself the mighty man he was—such knowledge all his guerdon,
Left the world a big book—people but in part err
When they style a true *Scientiæ Com-pen-di-um:*
"*Admirationem incutit*" they sourly
Smile, as fast they shut the folio which myself was somehow spurred on
Once to ope: but love—life's milk which daily, hourly,
Blockheads lap—O Peter, still thy taste of love's to come!

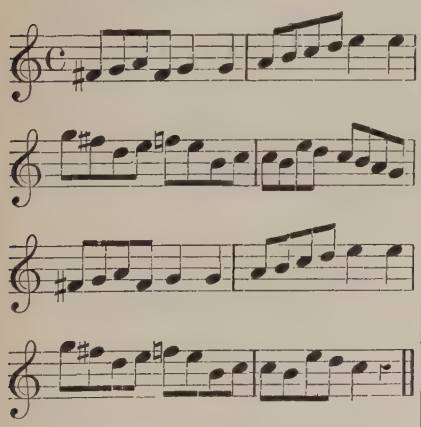
Greek, was your ambition likewise doomed to failure?
True, I find no record you wore purple, walked with axe and fasces,
Played some antipope's part: still, friend, don't turn tail, you're
Certain, with but these two gifts, to gain earth's prize in time!
Cleverness uncurbed by conscience—if you ransacked
Peter's book you'd find no potent spell like these to rule the masses;
Nor should want example, had I not to transact
Other business. Go your ways, you'll thrive! So ends my rhyme.

. . . .

When these parts Tiberius,—not yet Cæsar,—travelled,
Passing Padua, he consulted Padua's Oracle of Geryon

(God three-headed, thrice wise) just to get unravelled
Certain tangles of his future. "Fling at Abano
Golden dice," it answered: "dropt within the fount there,
Note what sum the pips present!" And still we see each die, the very one,
Turn up, through the crystal,—read the whole account there
Where 'tis told by Suetonius,—each its highest throw.

Scarce the sportive fancy-dice I fling show "Venus:"
Still—for love of that dear land which I so oft in dreams revisit—
I have—oh, not sung! but lilted (as—between us—
Grows my lazy custom) this its legend. What the lilt?



DOCTOR ——

A Rabbi told me: On the day allowed
Satan for carping at God's rule, he came,
Fresh from our earth, to brave the angel-crowd.

"What is the fault now?" "This I find to blame:
Many and various are the tongues below,
Yet all agree in one speech, all proclaim

"'Hell has no might to match what earth can show:
Death is the strongest-born of Hell, and yet
Stronger than Death is a Bad Wife, we know.'

"Is it a wonder if I fume and fret—
Robbed of my rights, since Death am I, and mine
The style of Strongest? Men pay Nature's debt

"Because they must at my demand; decline
To pay it henceforth surely men will please,
Provided husbands with bad wives combine

"To baffle Death. Judge between me and these!"
"Thyself shalt judge. Descend to earth in shape
Of mortal, marry, drain from froth to lees

"The bitter draught, then see if thou escape
Concluding, with men sorrowful and sage,
A Bad Wife's strength Death's self in vain would ape!"

How Satan entered on his pilgrimage,
Conformed himself to earthly ordinance,
Wived and played husband well from youth to age

Intrepidly—I leave untold, advance
Through many a married year until I reach
A day when—of his father's countenance

The very image, like him too in speech
As well as thought and deed,—the union's fruit
Attained maturity. "I needs must teach

"My son a trade: but trade, such son to suit,
Needs seeking after. He a man of war?
Too cowardly! A lawyer wins repute—

"Having to toil and moil, though—both
which are
Beyond this sluggard. There's Divinity:
No, that's my own bread-winner—that be far

"From my poor offspring! Physic? Ha,
we'll try
If this be practicable. Where's my wit?
Asleep?—since, now I come to think . . .
Ay, ay!

"Hither, my son! Exactly have I hit
On a profession for thee. *Medicus*—
Behold, thou art appointed! Yea, I spit

"Upon thine eyes, bestow a virtue thus
That henceforth not this human form I wear
Shalt thou perceive alone, but—one of us

"By privilege—thy fleshly sight shall bear
Me in my spirit-person as I walk
The world and take my prey appointed there.

"Doctor once dubbed—what ignorance shall
baulk
Thy march triumphant? Diagnose the gout
As cholic, and prescribe it cheese for chalk—

"No matter! All's one: cure shall come
about
And win thee wealth—fees paid with such
a roar
Of thanks and praise alike from lord and lout

"As never stunned man's ears on earth before.
'How may this be?' Why, that's my
sceptic! Soon
Truth will corrupt thee, soon thou doubt'st
no more!

"Why is it I bestow on thee the boon
Of recognizing me the while I go
Invisibly among men, morning, noon

"And night, from house to house, and—
quick or slow—
Take my appointed prey? They summon thee
For help, suppose: obey the summons! so!

"Enter, look round! Where's Death? Know
—I am he,
Satan who work all evil: I who bring
Pain to the patient in whate'er degree.

"I, then, am there: first glance thine eye
shall fling
Will find me—whether distant or at hand,
As I am free to do my spiriting.

"At such mere first glance thou shalt under-
stand
Wherefore I reach no higher up the room
Than door or window, when my form is
scanned.

"Howe'er friends' faces please to gather
gloom,
Bent o'er the sick,—howe'er himself de-
sponds,—
In such case Death is not the sufferer's doom.

"Contrariwise, do friends rejoice my bonds
Are broken, does the captive in his turn
Crow 'Life shall conquer'? Nip these foolish
fronds

"Of hope a-sprout, if haply thou discern
Me at the head—my victim's head, be sure!
Forth now! This taught thee, little else to
learn!"

And forth he went. Folk heard him ask
demure
"How do you style this ailment? (There
he peeps,
My father, through the arras!) Sirs, the cure

"Is plain as A. B. C.! Experience steeps
Blossoms of pennyroyal half an hour
In sherris. *Sumat!*—Lo, how sound he
sleeps—

"The subject you presumed was past the
power
Of Galen to relieve!" Or else "How's
this?
Why call for help so tardily? Clouds lour

"Portentously indeed, Sirs! (Nought's amiss:
He's at the bed-foot merely.) Still, the storm
May pass averted—not by quacks, I wis

"Like you, my masters! You, forsooth, perform
A miracle? Stand, sciolists, aside!
Blood, ne'er so cold, at ignorance grows warm!"

Which boasting by result was justified,
Big as might words be: whether drugged or left
Drugless, the patient always lived, not died.

Great the heir's gratitude, so nigh bereft
Of all he prized in this world: sweet the smile
Of disconcerted rivals: "Cure?—say, theft

"From Nature in despite of Art—so style
This off-hand kill-or-cure work! You did much,
I had done more: folk cannot wait awhile!"

But did the case change? was it—"Scarcely such
The symptoms as to warrant our recourse
To your skill, Doctor! Yet since just a touch

"Of pulse, a taste of breath, has all the force
With you of long investigation claimed
By others,—tracks an ailment to its source

"Intuitively,—may we ask unblamed
What from this pimple you prognosticate?"
"Death!" was the answer, as he saw and named

The coucher by the sick man's head. "Too late
You send for my assistance. I am bold
Only by Nature's leave, and bow to Fate!

"Besides, you have my rivals: lavish gold!
How comfortably quick shall life depart
Cosseted by attentions manifold!

"One day, one hour ago, perchance my art
Had done some service. Since you have yourselves
Chosen—before the horse—to put the cart,

"Why, Sirs, the sooner that the sexton delves
Your patient's grave, the better! How you stare
—Shallow, for all the deep books on your shelves!

"Fare you well, fumblers!" Do I need declare
What name and fame, what riches recompensed
The Doctor's practice? Never anywhere

Such an adept as daily evidenced
Each new vaticination! Oh, not he
Like dolts who dallied with their scruples, fenced

With subterfuge, nor gave out frank and free
Something decisive! If he said "I save
The patient," saved he was: if "Death will be

"His portion," you might count him dead. Thus brave,
Behold our worthy, sans competitor
Throughout the country, on the architrave

Of Glory's temple golden-lettered for
Machaon *redivivus!* So, it fell
That, of a sudden, when the Emperor

Was smit by sore disease, I need not tell
If any other Doctor's aid was sought
To come and forthwith make the sick Prince well.

"He will reward thee as a monarch ought.
Not much imports the malady; but then,
He clings to life and cries like one distraught

"For thee—who, from a simple citizen,
Mayst look to rise in rank,—nay, haply wear
A medal with his portrait,—always when

"Recovery is quite accomplished. There!
Pass to the presence!" Hardly has he crossed
The chamber's threshold when he halts, aware

Of who stands sentry by the head. All's lost.
"Sire, nought avails my art: you near the goal,
And end the race by giving up the ghost."

"How?" cried the monarch: "Names upon your roll
Of half my subjects rescued by your skill—
Old and young, rich and poor—crowd cheek by jowl

"And yet no room for mine? Be saved I will!
Why else am I earth's foremost potentate?
Add me to these and take as fee your fill

"Of gold—that point admits of no debate
Between us: save me, as you can and must,—
Gold, till your gown's pouch cracks beneath the weight!"

This touched the Doctor. "Truly a home-thrust,
Parent, you will not parry! Have I dared
Entreat that you forego the meal of dust

"—Man that is snake's meat—when I saw prepared
Your daily portion? Never! Just this once,
Go from his head, then,—let his life be spared!"

Whisper met whisper in the gruff response
"Fool, I must have my prey: no inch I budge
From where thou see'st me thus myself ensconce."

"Ah," moaned the sufferer, "by thy look I judge
Wealth fails to tempt thee: what if honours prove
More efficacious? Nought to him I grudge

"Who saves me. Only keep my head above
The cloud that's creeping round it—I'll divide
My empire with thee! No? What's left but—love?

"Does love allure thee? Well then, take as bride
My only daughter, fair beyond belief!
Save me—to-morrow shall the knot be tied!"

"Father, you hear him! Respite ne'er so brief
Is all I beg: go now and come again
Next day, for aught I care: respect the grief

"Mine will be if thy first-born sues in vain!"
"Fool, I must have my prey!" was all he got
In answer. But a fancy crossed his brain.

"I have it! Sire, methinks a meteor shot
Just now across the heavens and neutralized
Jove's salutary influence: 'neath the blot

"Plumb are you placed now: well that I surmised
The cause of failure! Knaves, reverse the bed!"
"Stay!" groaned the monarch, "I shall be capsized—

"Jolt—jolt—my heels uplift where late my head
Was lying—sure I'm turned right round at last!
What do you say now, Doctor?" Nought he said:

For why? With one brisk leap the Antic passed
From couch-foot back to pillow,—as before,
Lord of the situation. Long aghast

The Doctor gazed, then "Yet one trial more
Is left me" inwardly he uttered. "Shame
Upon thy flinty heart! Do I implore

"This trifling favour in the idle name
Of mercy to the moribund? I plead
The cause of all thou dost affect: my aim

"Befits my author! Why would I succeed?
Simply that by success I may promote
The growth of thy pet virtues—pride and greed.

"But keep thy favours!—curse thee! I devote
Henceforth my service to the other side.
No time to lose: the rattle's in his throat.

"So,—not to leave one last resource untried,—
Run to my house with all haste, somebody!
Bring me that knobstick thence, so often plied

"With profit by the astrologer—shall I
Disdain its help, the mystic Jacob's-Staff?
Sire, do but have the courage not to die

"Till this arrive! Let none of you dare laugh!
Though rugged its exterior, I have seen
That implement work wonders, send the chaff

"Quick and thick flying from the wheat—I mean,
By metaphor, a human sheaf it thrashed
Flail-like. Go fetch it! Or—a word between

"Just you and me, friend!—go bid, unabashed,
My mother, whom you'll find there, bring the stick
Herself—herself, mind!" Out the lackey dashed

Zealous upon the errand. Craft and trick
Are meat and drink to Satan: and he grinned
—How else?—at an excuse so politic

For failure: scarce would Jacob's-Staff rescind
Fate's firm decree! And ever as he neared
The agonizing one, his breath like wind

Froze to the marrow, while his eye-flash seared
Sense in the brain up: closelier and more close
Pressing his prey, when at the door appeared

—Who but his Wife the Bad? Whereof one dose,
One grain, one mite of the medicament,
Sufficed him. Up he sprang. One word, too gross

To soil my lips with,—and through ceiling went
Somehow the Husband. "That a storm's dispersed
We know for certain by the sulphury scent!

"Hail to the Doctor! Who but one so versed
In all Dame Nature's secrets had prescribed
The staff thus opportunely? Style him first

"And foremost of physicians!" "I've imbibed
Elixir surely," smiled the prince,—"have gained
New lease of life. Dear Doctor, how you bribed

"Death to forego me, boots not: you've obtained
My daughter and her dowry. Death, I've heard,
Was still on earth the strongest power that reigned,

"Except a Bad Wife!" Whereunto demurred
Nowise the Doctor, so refused the fee
—No dowry, no bad wife!

"You think absurd
This tale?"—the Rabbi added: "True, our Talmud
Boasts sundry such: yet—have our elders erred
In thinking there's some water there, not all mud?"
I tell it, as the Rabbi told it me.

PAN AND LUNA.

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic.* iii. 390.

O WORTHY of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!
No question, that adventure came to pass
One black night in Arcadia: yes, the pines,
Mountains and valleys mingling made one mass
Of black with void black heaven: the earth's confines,
The sky's embrace,—below, above, around,
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice:
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,
By turning round the bowl! So night can fuse
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less,
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when—diving into space,
Stript of all vapour, from each web of mist
Utterly film-free—entered on her race
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist
Of night and dark, night's dowry: peak to base,
Upstarted mountains, and each valley, kissed
To sudden life, lay silver-bright: in air
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth—where refuge seemed—
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct
Those limbs: mid still-retreating blue, she teemed
Herself with whiteness,—virginal, uncinct
By any halo save what finely gleamed
To outline not disguise her: heaven was linked
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,
A succourable cloud with sleep lay dense:
Some pine-tree-top had caught it sailing slow,
And tethered for a prize: in evidence
Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow
Drowsily patient: flake-heaped how or whence,
The structure of that succourable cloud,
What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud.

Orbed—so the woman-figure poets call
Because of rounds on rounds—that apple-shaped
Head which its hair binds close into a ball
Each side the curving ears—that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps—that . . . Once for all,
Say—her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerous circlets, sank absorbed,
Safe in the cloud—O naked Moon full-orbed!

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,
Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff
Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine
Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff
Fitting as close as fits the dented spine
Its flexile ivory outside-flesh: enough!
The plumy drifts contract, condense, constringe,
Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam
Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits
Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,—
If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets
What most she loathes and leaps from,—elf from gnome
No gladlier,—finds that safest of retreats
Bubble about a treacherous hand wide ope
To grasp her—(divers who pick pearls so grope)—

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught
By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract:
He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought
With simulated earth-breath,—wool-tufts packed
Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought
For spotless shearings yield such: take the fact
As learned Virgil gives it,—how the breed
Whitens itself for ever: yes, indeed!

If one forefather ram, though pure as chalk
From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue
Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men baulk
The propagating plague: he gets no young:
They rather slay him,—sell his hide to caulk
Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,
The purity we love is gained for us.

So did Girl-moon, by just her attribute
Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,
Bruised to the breast of Pan, half-god half-brute,
Raked by his bristly boar-sward while he lapped
—Never say, kissed her! that were to pollute
Love's language—which moreover proves unapt
To tell how she recoiled—as who finds thorns
Where she sought flowers—when, feeling, she touched—horns!

Then—does the legend say?—first moon-eclipse
Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore
The early sages? Is that why she dips
Into the dark, a minute and no more,
Only so long as serves her while she rips
The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,
Pursues her way? No lesson for a maid
Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed?

Ha, Virgil? Tell the rest, you! "To the deep
Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith
Called her, and so she followed"—in her sleep,
Surely?—"by no means spurning him." The myth
Explain who may! Let all else go, I keep
—As of a ruin just a monolith—
Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon:
Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.

"TOUCH him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke:
Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul!"

Indeed?
Rock's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:
Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age
Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.

JOCOSERIA.

1883.

WANTING is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
—Where is the blot?
Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
—Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Rose embowering with nought they embower!
Come then, complete incompletion, O comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
Breathe but one breath
Rose-beauty above,
And all that was death
Grows life, grows love,
Grows love!

DONALD.

"WILL you hear my story also,
—Huge Sport, brave adventure in plenty?"
The boys were a band from Oxford,
The oldest of whom was twenty.

The bothy we held carouse in
Was bright with fire and candle;
Tale followed tale like a merry-go-round
Whereof Sport turned the handle.

In our eyes and noses—turf-smoke:
In our ears a tune from the trivet,
Whence "Boiling, boiling," the kettle sang,
"And ready for fresh Glenlivet."

So, feat capped feat, with a vengeance:
Truths, though,—the lads were loyal:
"Grouse, five score brace to the bag!
Deer, ten hours' stalk of the Royal!"

Of boasting, not one bit, boys!
Only there seemed to settle
Somehow above your curly heads,
—Plain through the singing kettle,

Palpable through the cloud,
As each new-puffed Havanna
Rewarded the teller's well-told tale,—
This vaunt "To Sport—Hosanna!

"Hunt, fish, shoot,
Would a man fulfil life's duty!
Not to the bodily frame alone
Does Sport give strength and beauty,

"But character gains in—courage?
Ay, Sir, and much beside it!
You don't sport, more's the pity:
You soon would find, if you tried it,

"Good sportsman means good fellow,
Sound-hearted he, to the centre;
Your mealy-mouthed mild milksops
—There's where the rot can enter!

"There's where the dirt will breed,
The shabbiness Sport would banish!
Oh no, Sir, no! In your honoured case
All such objections vanish.

"'Tis known how hard you studied:
A Double-First—what, the jigger!
Give me but half your Latin and Greek,
I'll never again touch trigger!

"Still, tastes are tastes, allow me!
Allow, too, where there's keenness
For Sport, there's little likelihood
Of a man's displaying meanness!"

So, put on my mettle, I interposed.
"Will you hear my story?" quoth I.
"Never mind how long since it happed,
I sat, as we sit, in a bothy;

"With as merry a band of mates, too,
Undergrads all on a level:
(One's a Bishop, one's gone to the Bench,
And one's gone—well, to the Devil.)

"When, lo, a scratching and tapping!
In hobbled a ghastly visitor.
Listen to just what he told us himself
—No need of our playing inquisitor!"

Do you happen to know in Ross-shire
Mount . . . Ben . . . but the name scarce matters:
Of the naked fact I am sure enough,
Though I clothe it in rags and tatters.

You may recognise Ben by description;
Behind him—a moor's immenseness:
Up goes the middle mount of a range,
Fringed with its firs in denseness.

Rimming the edge, its fir-fringe, mind!
For an edge there is, though narrow;
From end to end of the range, a stripe
Of path runs straight as an arrow.

And the mountaineer who takes that path
Saves himself miles of journey
He has to plod if he crosses the moor
Through heather, peat and burnie.

But a mountaineer he needs must be,
For, look you, right in the middle
Projects bluff Ben—with an end in *ich*—
Why planted there, is a riddle:

Since all Ben's brothers little and big
Keep rank, set shoulder to shoulder,
And only this burliest out must bulge
Till it seems—to the beholder

From down in the gully,—as if Ben's breast
To a sudden spike diminished,
Would signify to the boldest foot
"All further passage finished!"

Yet the mountaineer who sidles on
And on to the very bending,
Discovers, if heart and brain be proof,
No necessary ending.

Foot up, foot down, to the turn abrupt
Having trod, he, there arriving,
Finds—what he took for a point was breadth,
A mercy of Nature's contriving.

So, he rounds what, when 'tis reached, proves straight,
From one side gains the other:
The wee path widens—resume the march,
And he foils you, Ben my brother!

But Donald—(that name, I hope, will do)—
I wrong him if I call "foiling"
The tramp of the callant, whistling the while
As blithe as our kettle's boiling.

He had dared the danger from boyhood up,
And now,—when perchance was waiting
A lass at the brig below,—'twixt mount
And moor would he stand debating?

Moreover this Donald was twenty-five,
A glory of bone and muscle:
Did a fiend dispute the right of way,
Donald would try a tussle.

Lightsomely marched he out of the broad
On to the narrow and narrow;
A step more, rounding the angular rock,
Reached the front straight as an arrow.

He stepped it, safe on the ledge he stood,
When—whom found he full-facing?
What fellow in courage and wariness too,
Had scouted ignoble pacing,

And left low safety to timid mates,
And made for the dread dear danger,
And gained the height where—who could guess
He would meet with a rival ranger?

'Twas a gold-red stag that stood and stared,
Gigantic and magnific,
By the wonder—ay, and the peril—struck
Intelligent and pacific:

For a red deer is no fallow deer
Grown cowardly through park-feeding;
He batters you like a thunderbolt
If you brave his haunts unheeding.

I doubt he could hardly perform *volte-face*
Had valour advised discretion:
You may walk on a rope, but to turn on a rope
No Blondin makes profession.

Yet Donald must turn, would pride permit,
Though pride ill brooks retiring:
Each eyed each—mute man, motionless beast—
Less fearing than admiring.

These are the moments when quite new sense,
To meet some need as novel,
Springs up in the brain: it inspired resource:
—"Nor advance nor retreat but—grovel!"

And slowly, surely, never a whit
Relaxing the steady tension
Of eye-stare which binds man to beast,—
By an inch and inch declension,

Sank Donald sidewise down and down:
Till flat, breast upwards, lying
At his six-foot length, no corpse more still,
—"If he cross me! The trick's worth trying."

Minutes were an eternity;
But a new sense was created
In the stag's brain too; he resolves! Slow, sure,
With eye-stare unabated,

Feelingly he extends a foot
Which tastes the way ere it touches
Earth's solid and just escapes man's soft,
Nor hold of the same unclutches

Till its fellow foot, light as a feather whisk,
Lands itself no less finely:
So a mother removes a fly from the face
Of her babe asleep supinely.

And now 'tis the haunch and hind foot's turn
—That's hard: can the beast quite raise it?
Yes, traversing half the prostrate length,
His hoof-tip does not graze it.

Just one more lift! But Donald, you see,
Was sportsman first, man after:
A fancy lightened his caution through,
—He well-nigh broke into laughter.

"It were nothing short of a miracle!
Unrivalled, unexampled—
All sporting feats with this feat matched
Were down and dead and trampled!"

The last of the legs as tenderly
Follows the rest: or never
Or now is the time! His knife in reach,
And his right-hand loose—how clever!

For this can stab up the stomach's soft,
While the left-hand grasps the pastern.
A rise on the elbow, and—now's the time
Or never: this turn's the last turn!

I shall dare to place myself by God
Who scanned—for He does—each feature
Of the face thrown up in appeal to Him
By the agonizing creature.

Nay, I hear plain words: "Thy gift brings this!"
Up he sprang, back he staggered,
Over he fell, and with him our friend
—At following game no laggard.

Yet he was not dead when they picked next day
From the gully's depth the wreck of him;
His fall had been stayed by the stag beneath
Who cushioned and saved the neck of him

But the rest of his body—why, doctors said,
Whatever could break was broken;
Legs, arms, ribs, all of him looked like a toast
In a tumbler of port-wine soaken.

"That your life is left you, thank the stag!"
Said they when—the slow cure ended—
They opened the hospital door, and thence
—Strapped, spliced, main fractures mended,

And minor damage left wisely alone,—
Like an old shoe clouted and cobbled,
Out—what went in a Goliath well-nigh,—
Some half of a David hobbled.

"You must ask an alms from house to house:
Sell the stag's head for a bracket,
With its grand twelve tines[1]—I'd buy it myself—
And use the skin for a jacket!"

He was wiser, made both head and hide
His win-penny: hands and knees on,
Would manage to crawl—poor crab—by the roads
In the misty stalking-season.

And if he discovered a bothy like this,
Why, harvest was sure: folk listened.
He told his tale to the lovers of Sport:
Lips twitched, cheeks glowed, eyes glistened.

And when he had come to the close, and spread
His spoils for the gazers' wonder,
With "Gentlemen, here's the skull of the stag
I was over, thank God, not under!"—

1 The branches of a stag's horn.

The company broke out in applause;
"By Jingo, a lucky cripple!
Have a munch of grouse and a hunk of bread,
And a tug, besides, at our tipple!"

And "There's my pay for your pluck!" cried This,
"And mine for your jolly story!"
Cried That, while T'other—but he was drunk—
Hiccupped "A trump, a Tory!"

I hope I gave twice as much as the rest;
For, as Homer would say, "within grate
Though teeth kept tongue," my whole soul growled
"Rightly rewarded,—Ingrate!"

SOLOMON AND BALKIS.

Solomon King of the Jews and the Queen of Sheba Balkis
Talk on the ivory throne, and we well may conjecture their talk is
Solely of things sublime: why else has she sought Mount Zion,
Climbed the six golden steps, and sat betwixt lion and lion?

She proves him with hard questions: before she has reached the middle
He smiling supplies the end, straight solves them riddle by riddle;
Until, dead-beaten at last, there is left no spirit in her,
And thus would she close the game whereof she was first beginner:

"O wisest thou of the wise, world's marvel and well-nigh monster,
One crabbed question more to construe or *vulgo* conster!
Who are those, of all mankind, a monarch of perfect wisdom
Should open to, when they knock at *spheteron do*—that's his dome?"

The King makes tart reply: "Whom else but the wise his equals
Should he welcome with heart and voice?—since, king though he be, such weak walls
Of circumstance—power and pomp—divide souls each from other
That whoso proves kingly in craft I needs must acknowledge my brother.

"Come poet, come painter, come sculptor, come builder—whate'er his condition,
Is he prime in his art? We are peers! My insight has pierced the partition
And hails—for the poem, the picture, the statue, the building—my fellow!
Gold's gold though dim in the dust: court-polish soon turns it yellow.

"But tell me in turn, O thou to thy weakling sex superior,
That for knowledge has travelled so far yet seemest no whit the wearier,—
Who are those, of all mankind, a queen like thyself, consummate
In wisdom, should call to her side with an affable 'Up hither, come, mate!'"

"The Good are my mates—how else? Why doubt it?" the Queen upbridled:
"Sure even above the Wise,—or in travel my eyes have idled,—
I see the Good stand plain: be they rich, poor, shrewd or simple,
If Good they only are. . . . Permit me to drop my wimple!"

And in that bashful jerk of her body, she—peace, thou scoffer!—
Jostled the King's right-hand stretched courteously help to proffer,
And so disclosed a portent: all unaware the Prince eyed
The Ring which bore the Name—turned outside now from inside!

The truth-compelling Name!—and at once "I greet the Wise—Oh,
Certainly welcome such to my court—with this proviso:
The building must be my temple, my person stand forth the statue,
The picture my portrait prove, and the poem my praise—you cat, you!"

But Solomon nonplussed? Nay! "Be truthful in turn!" so bade he:
"See the Name, obey its hest!" And at once subjoins the lady
—"Provided the Good are the young, men strong and tall and proper,
Such servants I straightway enlist,—which means . . ." but the blushes stop her.

"Ah, Soul," the Monarch sighed, "that wouldst soar yet ever crawlest,
How comes it thou canst discern the greatest yet choose the smallest,
Unless because heaven is far, where wings find fit expansion,
While creeping on all-fours suits, suffices the earthly mansion?

"Aspire to the Best! But which? There are Bests and Bests so many,
With a *habitat* each for each, earth's Best as much Best as any!
On Lebanon roots the cedar—soil lofty, yet stony and sandy—
While hyssop, of worth in its way, on the wall grows low but handy.

"Above may the Soul spread wing, spurn body and sense beneath her;
Below she must condescend to plodding unbuoyed by æther.
In heaven I yearn for knowledge, account all else inanity;
On earth I confess an itch for the praise of fools—that's Vanity.

"It is nought, it will go, it can never presume above to trouble me;
But here,—why, it toys and tickles and teases, howe'er I redouble me
In a doggedest of endeavours to play the indifferent. Therefore,
Suppose we resume discourse? Thou hast travelled thus far: but wherefore?

"Solely for Solomon's sake, to see whom
earth styles Sagest?"
Through her blushes laughed the Queen.
"For the sake of a Sage? The gay
jest!
On high, be communion with Mind—there,
Body concerns not Balkis:
Down here,—do I make too bold? Sage
Solomon,—one fool's small kiss!"

CRISTINA AND MONALDESCHI.

[This is a well-known story. Cristina was the daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, and succeeded to the throne of Sweden on his death in 1632. She was an ill-regulated woman of free life, of whom many curious tales are told. She abdicated in 1654 and became a Roman Catholic. Monaldeschi was an Italian reprobate, who became her Master of the Horse. She fell in love with him, and he made a fool of her. Discovering the truth, Cristina had him barbarously murdered at Fontainebleau. She then retired to Rome, where she died in 1689.]

Ah, but how each loved each, Marquis!
Here's the gallery they trod
Both together, he her god,
She his idol,—lend your rod,
Chamberlain!—ay, there they are—"*Quis
Separabit?"—plain those two
Touching words come into view,
Apposite for me and you:

Since they witness to incessant
Love like ours: King Francis, he—
Diane the adored one, she—
Prototypes of you and me.
Everywhere is carved her Crescent
With his Salamander-sign—
Flame-fed creature: flame benign
To itself or, if malign,

Only to the meddling curious,
—So, be warned, Sir! Where's my
head?
How it wanders! What I said
Merely meant—the creature, fed
Thus on flame, was scarce injurious
Save to fools who woke its ire,
Thinking fit to play with fire.
'Tis the Crescent you admire?

Then, be Diane! I'll be Francis.
Crescents change,—true!—wax and wane.
Woman-like: male hearts retain
Heat nor, once warm, cool again.
So, we figure—such our chance is—
I as man and you as . . . What?
Take offence? My Love forgot
He plays woman, I do not?

I—the woman? See my habit,
Ask my people! Anyhow,
Be we what we may, one vow
Binds us, male or female. Now,—
Stand, Sir! Read! "*Quis separabit?*"
Half a mile of pictured way
Past these palace-walls to-day
Traversed, this I came to say.

You must needs begin to love me;
First I hated, then, at best,
—Have it so!—I acquiesced;
Pure compassion did the rest.
From below thus raised above me,
Would you, step by step, descend,
Pity me, become my friend,
Like me, like less, loathe at end?

That's the ladder's round you rose by!
That—my own foot kicked away,
Having raised you: let it stay,
Serve you for retreating? Nay.
Close to me you climbed: as close by,
Keep your station, though the peak
Reached proves somewhat bare and bleak!
Woman's strong if man is weak.

Keep here, loving me forever!
Love's look, gesture, speech, I claim;
Act love, lie love, all the same—
Play as earnest were our game!
Lonely I stood long: 'twas clever
When you climbed, before men's eyes,
Spurned the earth and scaled the skies,
Gained my peak and grasped your prize.

Here you stood, then, to men's wonder;
Here you tire of standing? Kneel!
Cure what giddiness you feel,
This way! Do your senses reel?
Not unlikely! What rolls under?
Yawning death in yon abyss
Where the waters whirl and hiss
Round more frightful peaks than this.

Should my buffet dash you thither . . .
But be sage! No watery grave
Needs await you: seeming brave
Kneel on safe, dear timid slave!
You surmised, when you climbed hither,
Just as easy were retreat
Should you tire, conceive unmeet
Longer patience at my feet?

Me as standing, you as stooping,—
Who arranged for each the pose?
Lest men think us friends turned foes,
Keep the attitude you chose!
Men are used to this same grouping—
I and you like statues seen.
You and I, no third between,
Kneel and stand! That makes the scene.

Mar it—and one buffet . . . Pardon!
Needless warmth—wise words in waste!
'Twas prostration that replaced
Kneeling, then? A proof of taste.
Crouch, not kneel, while I mount guard on
Prostrate love—become no waif,
No estray to waves that chafe
Disappointed—love's so safe!

Waves that chafe? The idlest fancy!
Peaks that scare? I think we know
Walls enclose our sculpture: so
Grouped, we pose in Fontainebleau.
Up now! Wherefore hesitancy?
Arm in arm and cheek by cheek,
Laugh with me at waves and peak!
Silent still? Why, pictures speak.

See, where Juno strikes Ixion,
Primatice speaks plainly! Pooh—
Rather, Florentine Le Roux!
I've lost head for who is who—
So it swims and wanders! Fie on
What still proves me female! Here,
By the staircase!—for we near
That dark "Gallery of the Deer."

Look me in the eyes once! Steady!
Are you faithful now as erst
On that eve when we two first
Vowed at Avon, blessed and cursed
Faith and falsehood? Pale already?
Forward! Must my hand compel
Entrance—this way? Exit—well,
Somehow, somewhere. Who can tell?

What if to the self-same place in
Rustic Avon, at the door
Of the village church once more,
Where a tombstone paves the floor
By that holy-water basin
You appealed to—"As, below,
This stone hides its corpse, e'en so
I your secrets hide"? What ho!

Friends, my four! You, Priest, confess him!
I have judged the culprit there:
Execute my sentence! Care
For no mail such cowards wear!
Done, Priest? Then, absolve and bless him!
Now—you three, stab thick and fast,
Deep and deeper! Dead at last?
Thanks, friends—Father, thanks! Aghast?

What one word of his confession
Would you tell me, though I lured
With that royal crown abjured
Just because its bars immured
Love too much? Love burst compression,
Fled free, finally confessed
All its secrets to that breast
Whence . . . let Avon tell the rest!

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND FUSELI.

[Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," and the mother of the second Mrs. Shelley, was born in 1759. She fell in love with Fuseli, the well-known artist, who, however, with the able assistance of Mrs. Fuseli, contrived not to be won. Mary Wollstonecraft then went to Paris, and lived with Mr. Imlay, nor was it till after his desertion of her that she met and eventually married William Godwin. She was barely thirty-nine years old when she died in 1797.]

Oh but is it not hard, Dear?
Mine are the nerves to quake at a mouse:
If a spider drops I shrink with fear:
I should die outright in a haunted house;
While for you—did the danger dared bring help—
From a lion's den I could steal his whelp,
With a serpent round me, stand stock-still,
Go sleep in a churchyard,—so would will
Give me the power to dare and do
Valiantly—just for you!

Much amiss in the head, Dear,
I toil at a language, tax my brain
Attempting to draw—the scratches here!
I play, play, practise and all in vain:
But for you—if my triumph brought you pride,
I would grapple with Greek Plays till I died,
Paint a portrait of you—who can tell?
Work my fingers off for your "Pretty well:"
Language and painting and music too,
Easily done—for you!

Strong and fierce in the heart, Dear,
With—more than a will—what seems a power
To pounce on my prey, love outbroke here
In flame devouring and to devour.
Such love has laboured its best and worst
To win me a lover; yet, last as first,
I have not quickened his pulse one beat,
Fixed a moment's fancy, bitter or sweet:
Yet the strong fierce heart's love's labour's due,
Utterly lost, was—you!

ADAM, LILITH, AND EVE.

One day it thundered and lightened.
Two women, fairly frightened,
Sank to their knees, transformed, transfixed,
At the feet of the man who sat betwixt;
And "Mercy!" cried each—"if I tell the truth
Of a passage in my youth!"

Said This: "Do you mind the morning
I met your love with scorning?
As the worst of the venom left my lips,
I thought 'If, despite this lie, he strips
The mask from my soul with a kiss—I crawl
His slave,—soul, body and all!'"

Said That: "We stood to be married;
The priest, or someone, tarried;
'If Paradise-door prove locked?' smiled you.
I thought, as I nodded, smiling too,
'Did one, that's away, arrive—nor late
Nor soon should unlock Hell's gate!'"

It ceased to lighten and thunder.
Up started both in wonder,
Looked round and saw that the sky was clear,
Then laughed "Confess you believed us, Dear!"
"I saw through the joke!" the man replied
They re-seated themselves beside.

IXION.

[A king of the Lapithæ in Thessaly, who in consequence of his murdering his wife's father was "boycotted" by mankind. Zeus took compassion on him and let him into heaven, where, however, he fell in love with Heré, and was permitted to think he had embraced her in the form of a cloud. Zeus banished him, and as a punishment Ixion was tied to a perpetually revolving wheel.]

High in the dome, suspended, of Hell, sad triumph, behold us!
Here the revenge of a God, there the amends of a Man.

Whirling forever in torment, flesh once mortal, immortal
Made—for a purpose of hate—áble to die and revive,
Pays to the uttermost pang, then, newly for payment replenished,
Doles out—old yet young—agonies ever afresh;
Whence the result above me: torment is bridged by a rainbow,—
Tears, sweat, blood,—each spasm, ghastly once, glorified now.
Wrung, by the rush of the wheel ordained my place of reposing,
Off in a sparklike spray,—flesh become vapour thro' pain,—
Flies the bestowment of Zeus, soul's vaunted bodily vesture,
Made that his feats observed gain the approval of Man,—
Flesh that he fashioned with sense of the earth and the sky and the ocean,
Framed should pierce to the star, fitted to pore on the plant,—
All, for a purpose of hate, re-framed, re-fashioned, re-fitted
Till, consummate at length,—lo, the employment of sense!
Pain's mere minister now to the soul, once pledged to her pleasure—
Soul, if untrammelled by flesh, unapprehensive of pain!
Body, professed soul's slave, which serving beguiled and betrayed her,
Made things false seem true, cheated thro' eye and thro' ear,
Lured thus heart and brain to believe in the lying reported,—
Spurn but the traitorous slave, uttermost atom, away,
What should obstruct soul's rush on the real, the only apparent?
Say I have erred,—how else? Was I Ixion or Zeus?
Foiled by my senses I dreamed; I doubtless awaken in wonder:
This proves shine, that—shade? Good was the evil that seemed?
Shall I, with sight thus gained, by torture be taught I was blind once?
Sisuphos, teaches thy stone — Tantalos, teaches thy thirst
Aught which unaided sense, purged pure, less plainly demonstrates?
No, for the past was dream: now that the dreamers awake,
Sisuphos scouts low fraud, and to Tantalos treason is folly.
Ask of myself, whose form melts on the murderous wheel,
What is the sin which throe and throe prove sin to the sinner!
Say the false charge was true,—thus do I expiate, say,
Arrogant thought, word, deed,—mere man who conceited me godlike,
Sat beside Zeus, my friend—knelt before Heré, my love!
What were the need but of pitying power to touch and disperse it,
Film-work—eye's and ear's—all the distraction of sense?
How should the soul not see, not hear,—perceive and as plainly
Render, in thought, word, deed, back again truth—not a lie?
"Ay, but the pain is to punish thee!" Zeus, once more for a pastime,
Play the familiar, the frank! Speak and have speech in return!
I was of Thessaly king, there ruled and a people obeyed me:
Mine to establish the law, theirs to obey it or die:
Wherefore? Because of the good to the people, because of the honour
Thence accruing to me, king, the king's law was supreme.
What of the weakling, the ignorant criminal? Not who, excuseless,
Breaking my law braved death, knowing his deed and its due—
Nay, but the feeble and foolish, the poor transgressor, of purpose
No whit more than a tree, born to erectness of bole,

Palm or plane or pine, we laud if lofty, columnar—
Loathe if athwart, askew,—leave to the axe and the flame!
Where is the vision may penetrate earth and beholding acknowledge
Just one pebble at root ruined the straightness of stem?
Whose fine vigilance follows the sapling, accounts for the failure,
—Here blew wind, so it bent: there the snow lodged, so it broke?
Also the tooth of the beast, bird's bill, mere bite of the insect
Gnawed, gnarled, warped their worst: passive it lay to offence.
King—I was man, no more: what I recognized faulty I punished,
Laying it prone: be sure, more than a man had I proved,
Watch and ward o'er the sapling at birth-time had saved it, nor simply
Owned the distortion's excuse,—hindered it wholly: nay, more—
Even a man, as I sat in my place to do judgment, and pallid
Criminals passing to doom shuddered away at my foot,
Could I have probed thro' the face to the heart, read plain a repentance,
Crime confessed fools' play, virtue ascribed to the wise,
Had I not stayed the consignment to doom, not dealt the renewed ones
Life to retraverse the past, light to retrieve the misdeed?
Thus had I done, and thus to have done much more it behoves thee,
Zeus who madest man—flawless or faulty, thy work!
What if the charge were true, as thou mouthest,—Ixion the cherished
Minion of Zeus grew vain, vied with the godships and fell,
Forfeit thro' arrogance? Stranger! I clothed, with the grace of our human,
Inhumanity—gods, natures I likened to ours.
Man among men I had borne me till gods forsooth must regard me
—Nay, must approve, applaud, claim as a comrade at last.
Summoned to enter their circle, I sat—their equal, how other?
Love should be absolute love, faith is in fulness or nought.
"I am thy friend, be mine!" smiled Zeus: "If Heré attract thee,"
Blushed the imperial cheek, "then—as thy heart may suggest!"
Faith in me sprang to the faith, my love hailed love as its fellow,
"Zeus, we are friends—how fast! Heré, my heart for thy heart!"
Then broke smile into fury of frown, and the thunder of "Hence, fool!"
Then thro' the kiss laughed scorn "Limbs or a cloud was to clasp?"
Then from Olumpos to Erebos, then from the rapture to torment,
Then from the fellow of gods—misery's mate, to the man!
—Man henceforth and forever, who lent from the glow of his nature
Warmth to the cold, with light coloured the black and the blank.
So did a man conceive of your passion, you passion-protesters!
So did he trust, so love—being the truth of your lie!
You to aspire to be Man! Man made you who vainly would ape him:
You are the hollowness, he—filling you, falsifies void.
Even as—witness the emblem, Hell's sad triumph suspended,
Born of my tears, sweat, blood—bursting to vapour above—
Arching my torment, an iris ghostlike startles the darkness,
Cold white—jewelry quenched—justifies, glorifies pain.
Strive, mankind, though strife endure through endless obstruction,
Stage after stage, each rise marred by as certain a fall!

Baffled forever—yet never so baffled but, e'en in the baffling,
When Man's strength proves weak, checked in the body or soul—
Whatsoever the medium, flesh or essence,—Ixion's
Made for a purpose of hate,—clothing the entity Thou,
—Medium whence that entity strives for the Not-Thou beyond it,
Fire elemental, free, frame unencumbered, the All,—
Never so baffled but—when, on the verge of an alien existence,
Heartened to press, by pangs burst to the infinite Pure,
Nothing is reached but the ancient weakness still that arrests strength,
Circumambient still, still the poor human array,
Pride and revenge and hate and cruelty—all it has burst through,
Thought to escape,—fresh formed, found in the fashion it fled,—
Never so baffled but—when Man pays the price of endeavour,
Thunderstruck, downthrust, Tartaros-doomed to the wheel,—
Then, ay, then, from the tears and sweat and blood of his torment,
E'en from the triumph of Hell, up let him look and rejoice!
What is the influence, high o'er Hell, that turns to a rapture
Pain—and despair's murk mists blends in a rainbow of hope?
What is beyond the obstruction, stage by stage tho' it baffle?
Back must I fall, confess "Ever the weakness I fled"?
No, for beyond, far, far is a Purity all-unobstructed!
Zeus was Zeus—not Man: wrecked by his weakness, I whirl.
Out of the wreck I rise—past Zeus to the Potency o'er him!
I—to have hailed him my friend! I—to have clasped her—my love!
Pallid birth of my pain,—where light, where light is, aspiring
Thither I rise, whilst thou—Zeus, keep the godship and sink!

JOCHANAN HAKKADOSH.

[Rabbi Yehudah Hannasi, otherwise Jochanan (John) Hakkadosh, was born in the second Christian century. Hakkadosh means holy.]

"This now, this other story makes amends
And justifies our Mishna," quoth the Jew
Aforesaid. "Tell it, learnedest of friends!"

A certain morn broke beautiful and blue
O'er Schiphaz[1] city, bringing joy and mirth,
—So had ye deemed; while the reverse was true,

Since one small house there gave a sorrow birth
In such black sort that, to each faithful eye,
Midnight, not morning settled on the earth.

How else, when it grew certain thou wouldst die
Our much-enlightened master, Israel's prop,
Eximious Jochanan Ben Sabbathai?[2]

Old, yea but, undiminished of a drop,
The vital essence pulsed through heart and brain;
Time left unsickled yet the plenteous crop

On poll and chin and cheek, whereof a skein
Handmaids might weave—hairs silk-soft, silver-white,
Such as the wool-plant's; none the less in vain

Had Physic striven her best against the spite
Of fell disease: the Rabbi must succumb;
And, round the couch whereon in piteous plight

[1] Perhaps Sheeraz.
[2] Probably an imaginary Rabbi.

He lay a-dying, scholars,—awe-struck, dumb
Throughout the night-watch,—roused themselves and spoke
One to the other: "Ere death's touch benumb

"His active sense,—while yet 'neath Reason's yoke
Obedient toils his tongue,—befits we claim
The fruit of long experience, bid this oak

"Shed us an acorn which may, all the same,
Grow to a temple-pillar,—dear that day!—
When Israel's scattered seed finds place and name

"Among the envious nations. Lamp us, pray,
Thou the Enlightener! Partest hence in peace?
Hailest without regret—much less, dismay—

"The hour of thine approximate release
From fleshly bondage soul hath found obstruct?
Calmly envisagest the sure increase

"Of knowledge? Eden's tree must hold unplucked
Some apple, sure, has never tried thy tooth,
Juicy with sapience thou hast sought, not sucked?

"Say, does age acquiesce in vanished youth?
Still towers thy purity above—as erst—
Our pleasant follies? Be thy last word—truth!"

The Rabbi groaned; then, grimly, "Last as first
The truth speak I—in boyhood who began
Striving to live an angel, and, amerced

"For such presumption, die now hardly man.
What have I proved of life? To live, indeed,
That much I learned: but here lies Jochanan

"More luckless than stood David when, to speed
His fighting with the Philistine, they brought
Saul's harness forth: whereat, 'Alack, I need

"'Armour to arm me, but have never fought
With sword and spear, nor tried to manage shield,
Proving arms' use, as well-trained warrior ought.

"'Only a sling and pebbles can I wield!'
So he: while I, contrariwise, 'No trick
Of weapon helpful on the battle-field

"'Comes unfamiliar to my theoric:
But, bid me put in practice what I know,
Give me a sword—it stings like Moses' stick,

"'A serpent I let drop apace.' E'en so,
I,—able to comport me at each stage
Of human life as never here below

"Man played his part,—since mine the heritage
Of wisdom carried to that perfect pitch,
Ye rightly praise,—I, therefore, who, thus sage,

"Could sure act man triumphantly, enrich
Life's annals with example how I played
Lover, Bard, Soldier, Statist,—(all of which

"Parts in presentment failing, cries invade
The world's ear—'Ah, the Past, the pearl-gift thrown
To hogs, time's opportunity we made

"'So light of, only recognized when flown!
Had we been wise!')—in fine, I—wise enough,—
What profit brings me wisdom never shown

"Just when its showing would from each rebuff
Shelter weak virtue, threaten back to bounds
Encroaching vice, tread smooth each track too rough

"For youth's unsteady footstep, climb the rounds
Of life's long ladder, one by slippery one,
Yet make no stumble? Me hard fate confounds

"With that same crowd of wailers I outrun
By promising to teach another cry
Of more hilarious mood than theirs, the sun

"I look my last at is insulted by.
What cry,—ye ask? Give ear on every side!
Witness yon Lover! 'How entrapped am I!

"'Methought, because a virgin's rose-lip vied
With ripe Khubbezleh's,[1] needs must beauty mate
With meekness and discretion in a bride:

"'Bride she became to me who wail—too late—
Unwise I loved!' That's one cry. 'Mind's my gift:
I might have loaded me with lore, full weight

"'Pressed down and running over at each rift
O' the brain-bag where the famished clung and fed.
I filled it with what rubbish!—would not sift

"'The wheat from chaff, sound grain from musty—shed
Poison abroad as oft as nutriment—
And sighing say but as my fellows said,

"'*Unwise I learned!*' That's two. 'In dwarf's-play spent
Was giant's prowess: warrior all unversed
In war's right waging, I struck brand, was lent

"'For steel's fit service, on mere stone—and cursed
Alike the shocked limb and the shivered steel,
Seeing too late the blade's true use which erst

"'How was I blind to! My cry swells the peal—
Unwise I fought!' That's three. But wherefore waste
Breath on the wailings longer? Why reveal

"A root of bitterness whereof the taste
Is noisome to Humanity at large?
First we get Power, but Power absurdly placed

"In Folly's keeping, who resigns her charge
To Wisdom when all Power grows nothing worth:
Bones marrowless are mocked with helm and targe

"When, like your Master's, soon below the earth
With worms shall warfare only be. Farewell,
Children! I die a failure since my birth!"

"Not so!" arose a protest as, pell-mell,
They pattered from his chamber to the street,
Bent on a last resource. Our Targums[2] tell

That such resource there is. Put case, there meet
The Nine Points of Perfection — rarest chance—
Within some saintly teacher whom the fleet

Years, in their blind implacable advance,
O'ertake before fit teaching born of these
Have magnified his scholars' countenance,—

If haply folk compassionating please
To render up—according to his store,
Each one—a portion of the life he sees

Hardly worth saving when 'tis set before
Earth's benefit should the Saint, Hakkadosh,
Favoured thereby, attain to full fourscore—

If such contribute (Scoffer, spare thy "Bosh!")
A year, a month, a day, an hour—to eke
Life out,—in him away the gift shall wash

[1] A fanciful name.

[2] Chaldean versions of the Old Testament developed out of the oral translations and paraphrases of the Scriptures read in the synagogues of the Jews.

That much of ill-spent time recorded, streak
The twilight of the so-assisted sage
With a new sunrise: truth, though strange to speak!

Quick to the doorway, then, where youth and age,
All Israel, thronging, waited for the last
News of the loved one. "'Tis the final stage:

"Art's utmost done, the Rabbi's feet tread fast
The way of all flesh!" So announced that apt
Olive-branch Tsaddik:[1] "Yet, O Brethren, cast

"No eye to earthward! Look where heaven has clapped
Morning's extinguisher—yon ray-shot robe
Of sun-threads—on the constellation mapped

"And mentioned by our Elders,—yea, from Job
Down to Satam,—as figuring forth—what?
Perpend a mystery! Ye call it *Dob*—

"'The Bear': I trow, a wiser name than that
Were *Aisch*—'The Bier':[2] a corpse those four stars hold,
Which—are not those Three Daughters weeping at,

"*Banoth?* I judge so: list while I unfold
The reason. As in twice twelve hours this Bier
Goes and returns, about the East-cone rolled,

"So may a setting luminary here
Be rescued from extinction, rolled anew
Upon its track of labour, strong and clear,

"About the Pole—that Salem, every Jew
Helps to build up when thus he saves some Saint
Ordained its architect. Ye grasp the clue

"To all ye seek? The Rabbi's lamp-flame faint
Sinks: would ye raise it? Lend then life from yours,
Spare each his oil-drop! Do I need acquaint

"The Chosen how self-sacrifice ensures
Ten-fold requital?—urge ye emulate
The fame of those Old Just Ones death procures

"Such praise for, that 'tis now men's sole debate
Which of the Ten, who volunteered at Rome
To die for glory to our Race, was great

"Beyond his fellows? Was it thou—the comb
Of iron carded, flesh from bone, away,
While thy lips sputtered thro' their bloody foam

"Without a stoppage (O brave Akiba!)[3]
'Hear, Israel, our Lord God is One'? Or thou,
Jischab?—who smiledst, burning, since there lay,

"Burning along with thee, our Law! I trow,
Such martyrdom might tax flesh to afford:
While that for which I make petition now,

"To what amounts it? Youngster, wilt thou hoard
Each minute of long years thou look'st to spend
In dalliance with thy spouse? Hast thou so soared,

"Singer of songs, all out of sight of friend
And teacher, warbling like a woodland bird,
There's left no Selah, 'twixt two psalms, to lend

[1] A fanciful name.

[2] The Jews called the constellation Krometrus, or the "Great Bear;" the Bier and the tail stars of the Bear they called the *Three Daughters*. Banoth means daughters.

[3] Rabbi Akiba was a Jewish teacher, who had much to do with the great collection of Rabbinical discussions on the law of Moses known as the *Mishnah*. The comments on the Mishnah are called *Gemara*, and both together make up the *Talmud*. Akiba took part in the famous rebellion against Rome led by Barcocheba A.D. 132–135, who was believed to be the Messiah. The rebellion failed, and Akiba is said to have been scraped to death with an iron comb.

"Our late-so-tuneful quirist? Thou, averred
The fighter born to plant our lion-flag
Once more on Zion's mount,—doth, all-unheard,

"My pleading fail to move thee? Toss some rag
Shall staunch our wound, some minute never missed
From swordsman's lustihood like thine! Wilt lag

"In liberal bestowment, show close fist
When open palm we look for,—thou, wide-known
For statecraft? whom, 'tis said, an if thou list,

"The Shah himself would seat beside his throne,
So valued were advice from thee" . . . But here
He stopped short: such a hubbub! Not alone

From those addressed, but, far as well as near,
The crowd broke into clamour: "Mine, mine, mine—
Lop from my life the excrescence, never fear!

"At me thou lookedst, markedst me! Assign
To me that privilege of granting life—
Mine, mine!" Then he: "Be patient! I combine

"The needful portions only, wage no strife
With Nature's law nor seek to lengthen out
The Rabbi's day unduly. 'Tis the knife

"I stop,—would cut its thread too short. About
As much as helps life last the proper term,
The appointed Fourscore,—that I crave and scout

"A too-prolonged existence. Let the worm
Change at fit season to the butterfly!
And here a story strikes me, to confirm

"This judgment. Of our worthies, none ranks high
As Perida[1] who kept the famous school:
None rivalled him in patience: none! For why?

"In lecturing it was his constant rule,
Whatever he expounded, to repeat
—Ay, and keep on repeating, lest some fool

"Should fail to understand him fully—(feat
Unparalleled, Uzzean![2])—do ye mark?—
Five hundred times! So might he entrance beat

"For knowledge into howsoever dark
And dense the brain-pan. Yet it happed, at close
Of one especial lecture, not one spark

"Of light was found to have illumed the rows
Of pupils round their pedagogue. 'What, still
Impenetrable to me? Then—here goes!'

"And for a second time he sets the rill
Of knowledge running, and five hundred times
More re-repeats the matter—and gains *nil*.

"Out broke a voice from heaven: 'Thy patience climbs
Even thus high. Choose! Wilt thou, rather, quick
Ascend to bliss—or, since thy zeal sublimes

"'Such drudgery, will thy back still bear its crick,
Bent o'er thy class,—thy voice drone spite of drouth,—
Five hundred years more at thy desk wilt stick?'

[1] A Jewish teacher famous for his patience.
[2] Job.

"'To heaven with me!' was in the good man's mouth,
When all his scholars, — cruel-kind were they!—
Stopped utterance, from East, West, North and South,

"Rending the welkin with their shout of 'Nay—
No heaven as yet for our instructor! Grant
Five hundred years on earth for Perida!'

"And so long did he keep instructing! Want
Our Master no such misery! I but take
Three months of life marital. Ministrant

"Be thou of so much, Poet! Bold I make,
Swordsman, with thy frank offer!—and conclude,
Statist, with thine! One year,—ye will not shake

"My purpose to accept no more. So rude?
The very boys and girls, forsooth, must press
And proffer their addition? Thanks! The mood

"Is laudable, but I reject, no less,
One month, week, day of life more. Leave my gown,
Ye overbold ones! Your life's gift, you guess,

"Were good as any? Rudesby, get thee down!
Set my feet free, or fear my staff! Farewell,
Seniors and saviours, sharers of renown

"With Jochanan henceforward!" Straightway fell
Sleep on the sufferer; who awoke in health,
Hale everyway, so potent was the spell.

O the rare Spring-time! Who is he by stealth
Approaches Jochanan?—embowered that sits
Under his vine and figtree mid the wealth

Of garden-sights and sounds, since intermits
Never the turtle's coo, nor stays nor stints
The rose her smell. In homage that befits

The musing Master, Tsaddik, see, imprints
A kiss on the extended foot, low bends
Forehead to earth, then, all-obsequious, hints

"What if it should be time? A period ends—
That of the Lover's gift—his quarter-year
Of lustihood: 'tis just thou make amends,

"Return that loan with usury: so, here
Come I, of thy Disciples delegate,
Claiming our lesson from thee. Make appear

"Thy profit from experience! Plainly state
How men should Love!" Thus he: and to him thus
The Rabbi: "Love, ye call it?—rather, Hate!

"What wouldst thou? Is it needful I discuss
Wherefore new sweet wine, poured in bottles caked
With old strong wine's deposit, offers us

"Spoilt liquor we recoil from, thirst-unslaked?
Like earth-smoke from a crevice, out there wound
Languors and yearnings: not a sense but ached

"Weighed on by fancied form and feature, sound
Of silver word and sight of sunny smile:
No beckoning of a flower-branch, no profound

"Purple of noon-oppression, no light wile
O' the West wind, but transformed itself till —brief—
Before me stood the phantasy ye style

"Youth's love, the joy that shall not come to grief,
Born to endure, eternal, unimpaired
By custom the accloyer, time the thief.

"Had Age's hard cold knowledge only spared
That ignorance of Youth! But now the dream,
Fresh as from Paradise, alighting fared

"As fares the pigeon, finding what may seem
Her nest's safe hollow holds a snake inside
Coiled to enclasp her. See, Eve stands supreme

"In youth and beauty! Take her for thy bride!
What Youth deemed crystal, Age finds out was dew
Morn set a-sparkle, but which noon quick dried

"While Youth bent gazing at its red and blue
Supposed perennial,—never dreamed the sun
Which kindled the display would quench it too.

"Graces of shape and colour—everyone
With its appointed period of decay
When ripe to purpose! 'Still, these dead and done,

"'Survives the woman-nature—the soft sway
Of undefinable omnipotence
O'er our strong male-stuff, we of Adam's clay.'

"Ay, if my physics taught not why and whence
The attraction! Am I like the simple steer
Who, from his pasture lured inside the fence

"Where yoke and goad await him, holds that mere
Kindliness prompts extension of the hand
Hollowed for barley, which drew near and near

"His nose—in proof that, of the horned band,
The farmer best affected him? Beside,
Steer, since his calfhood, got to understand

"Farmers a many in the world so wide
Were ready with a handful just as choice
Or choicer—maize and cummin, treats untried.

"Shall I wed wife, and all my days rejoice
I gained the peacock? 'Las me, round I look,
And lo—'With me thou wouldst have blamed no voice

"'Like hers that daily deafens like a rook:
I am the phœnix!'—'I, the lark, the dove,
—The owl,' for aught knows he who blindly took

"Peacock for partner, while the vale, the grove,
The plain held bird-mates in abundance. There!
Youth, try fresh capture! Age has found out Love

"Long ago. War seems better worth man's care.
But leave me! Disappointment finds a balm
Haply in slumber." "This first step o' the stair

"To knowledge fails me, but the victor's palm
Lies on the next to tempt him overleap
A stumbling-block. Experienced, gather calm,

"Thou excellence of Judah, cured by sleep
Which ushers in the Warrior, to replace
The Lover! At due season I shall reap

"Fruit of my planting!" So, with lengthened face,
Departed Tsaddik: and three moons more waxed
And waned, and not until the Summer-space

Waned likewise, any second visit taxed
The Rabbi's patience. But at three months' end,
Behold, supine beneath a rock, relaxed

The sage lay musing till the noon should spend
Its ardour. Up comes Tsaddik, who but he,
With "Master, may I warn thee, nor offend,

"That time comes round again? We look to see
Sprout from the old branch—not the young-ling twig—
But fruit of sycamine: deliver me,

"To share among my fellows, some plump fig,
Juicy as seedy! That same man of war,
Who, with a scantling of his store, made big

"Thy starveling nature, caused thee, safe from scar,
To share his gains by long acquaintanceship
With bump and bruise and all the knocks that are

"Of battle dowry,—he bids loose thy lip,
Explain the good of battle! Since thou know'st
Let us know likewise! Fast the moments slip,

"More need that we improve them!"—
"Ay, we boast,
We warriors in our youth, that with the sword
Man goes the swiftliest to the uttermost—

"Takes the straight way thro' lands yet unexplored
To absolute Right and Good,—may so obtain
God's glory and man's weal too long ignored,

"Too late attained by preachments all in vain—
The passive process. Knots get tangled worse
By toying with: does cut cord close again?

"Moreover there is blessing in the curse
Peace-praisers call war. What so sure evolves
All the capacities of soul, proves nurse

"Of that self-sacrifice in men which solves
The riddle—*Wherein differs Man from beast?*
Foxes boast cleverness and courage wolves:

"Nowhere but in mankind is found the least
Touch of an impulse 'To our fellows—good
I' the highest!—not diminished but increased

"'By the condition plainly understood
—Such good shall be attained at price of hurt
I' the highest to ourselves!' Fine sparks, that brood

"Confusedly in Man, 'tis war bids spurt
Forth into flame: as fares the meteor-mass,
Whereof no particle but holds inert

"Some seed of light and heat, however crass
The enclosure, yet avails not to discharge
Its radiant birth before there come to pass

"Some push external,—strong to set at large
Those dormant fire-seeds, whirl them in a trice
Through heaven and light up earth from marge to marge:

"Since force by motion makes—what erst was ice—
Crash into fervency and so expire,
Because some Djinn has hit on a device

"For proving the full prettiness of fire!
Ay, thus we prattle—young: but old—why, first,
Where's that same Right and Good—(the wise inquire)—

"So absolute, it warrants the outburst
Of blood, tears, all war's woeful consequence,
That comes of the fine flaring? Which plague cursed

"The more your benefited Man—offence,
Or what suppressed the offender? Say it did—
Show us the evil cured by violence,

"Submission cures not also! Lift the lid
From the maturing crucible, we find
Its slow sure coaxing-out of virtue hid

"In that same meteor-mass, hath uncombined
Those particles and, yielding for result
Gold, not mere flame, by so much leaves behind

"The heroic product. E'en the simple cult
Of Edom's [1] children wisely bids them turn
Cheek to the smiter with '*Sic Jesus vult.*'

[1] Stands for the Gentile in Jewish phraseology.

"Say there's a tyrant by whose death we earn
Freedom, and justify a war to wage:
Good!—were we only able to discern

"Exactly how to reach and catch and cage
Him only and no innocent beside!
Whereas the folk whereon war wreaks its rage

"—How shared they his ill-doing? Far and wide
The victims of our warfare strew the plain,
Ten thousand dead, whereof not one but died

"In faith that vassals owed their suzerain
Life: therefore each paid tribute,—honest soul,—
To that same Right and Good ourselves are fain

"To call exclusively our end. From bole
(Since ye accept in me a sycamine)
Pluck, eat, digest a fable—yea, the sole

"Fig I afford you! 'Dost thou dwarf my vine?'
(So did a certain husbandman address
The tree which faced his field), 'Receive condign

"'Punishment, prompt removal by the stress
Of axe I forthwith lay unto thy root!'
Long did he hack and hew, the root no less

"As long defied him, for its tough strings shoot
As deep down as the boughs above aspire:
All that he did was—shake to the tree's foot

"Leafage and fruitage, things we most require
For shadow and refreshment: which good deed
Thoroughly done, behold the axe-haft tires

"His hand, and he desisting leaves unfreed
The vine he hacked and hewed for. Comes a frost,
One natural night's work, and there's little need

"Of hacking, hewing: lo, the tree's a ghost!
Perished it starves, black death from topmost bough
To farthest-reaching fibre! Shall I boast

"My rough work,—warfare,—helped more? Loving, now—
That, by comparison, seems wiser, since
The loving fool was able to avow

"He could effect his purpose, just evince
Love's willingness,—once 'ware of what she lacked,
His loved one,—to go work for that, nor wince

"At self-expenditure: he neither hacked
Nor hewed, but when the lady of his field
Required defence because the sun attacked,

"He, failing to obtain a fitter shield,
Would interpose his body, and so blaze,
Blest in the burning. Ah, were mine to wield

"The intellectual weapon—poet-lays,—
How preferably had I sung one song
Which . . . but my sadness sinks me: go your ways!

"I sleep out disappointment." "Come along,
Never lose heart! There's still as much again
Of our bestowment left to right the wrong

"Done by its earlier moiety—explain
Wherefore, who may! The Poet's mood comes next.
Was he not wishful the poetic vein

"Should pulse within him? Jochanan, thou reck'st
Little of what a generous flood shall soon
Float thy clogged spirit free and unperplexed

"Above dry dubitation! Song's the boon
Shall make amends for my untoward mistake
That Joshua-like thou couldst bid sun and moon—

"Fighter and Lover,—which for most men make
All they descry in heaven,—stand both stock-still
And lend assistance. Poet shalt thou wake!"

Autumn brings Tsaddik. "Ay, there speeds the rill
Loaded with leaves: a scowling sky, beside:
The wind makes olive-trees up yonder hill

"Whiten and shudder—symptoms far and wide
Of gleaning-time's approach; and glean good store
May I presume to trust we shall, thou tried

"And ripe experimenter! Three months more
Have ministered to growth of Song: that graft
Into thy sterile stock has found at core

"Moisture, I warrant, hitherto unquaffed
By boughs, however florid, wanting sap
Of prose-experience which provides the draught

"Which song-sprouts, wanting, wither: vain we tap
A youngling stem all green and immature:
Experience must secret the stuff, our hap

"Will be to quench Man's thirst with, glad and sure
That fancy wells up through corrective fact:
Missing which test of truth, though flowers allure

"The goodman's eye with promise, soon the pact
Is broken, and 'tis flowers,—mere words,—he finds
When things,—that's fruit,—he looked for. Well, once cracked

"The nut, how glad my tooth the kernel grinds!
Song may henceforth boast substance! Therefore, hail
Proser and poet, perfect in both kinds!

"Thou from whose eye hath dropped the envious scale
Which hides the truth of things and substitutes
Deceptive show, unaided optics fail

"To transpierce,—hast entrusted to the lute's
Soft but sure guardianship some unrevealed
Secret shall lift mankind above the brutes

"As only knowledge can?" "A fount unsealed"
(Sighed Jochanan) "should seek the heaven in leaps
To die in dew-gems—not find death, congealed

"By contact with the cavern's nether deeps,
Earth's secretest foundation where, enswathed
In dark and fear, primæval mystery sleeps—

"Petrific fount wherein my fancies bathed
And straight turned ice. My dreams of good and fair
In soaring upwards had dissolved, unscathed

"By any influence of the kindly air,
Singing, as each took flight, The Future—that's
Our destination, mists turn rainbows there,

"Which sink to fog, confounded in the flats
O' the Present! Day's the song-time for the lark,
Night for her music boasts but owls and bats.

"And what's the Past but night—the deep and dark
Ice-spring I speak of, corpse-thicked with its drowned
Dead fancies which no sooner touched the mark

"They aimed at—fact—than all at once they found
Their film-wings freeze, henceforth unfit to reach
And roll in æther, revel—robed and crowned

"As truths, confirmed by falsehood all and each—
Sovereign and absolute and ultimate!
Up with them, skyward, Youth, ere Age impeach

"Thy least of promises to re-instate
Adam in Eden! Sing on, ever sing,
Chirp till thou burst!—the fool cicada's fate,

"Who holds that after Summer next comes Spring,
Than Summer's self sun-warmed, spice-scented more.
Fighting was better! There, no fancy-fling

"Pitches you past the point was reached of yore
By Sampsons, Abners, Joabs, Judases,
The mighty men of valour who, before

"Our little day, did wonders none profess
To doubt were fable and not fact, so trust
By fancy-flights to emulate much less.

"Were I a Statesman, now! Why, that were just
To pinnacle my soul, mankind above,
A-top the universe: no vulgar lust

"To gratify—fame, greed, at this remove
Looked down upon so far—or overlooked
So largely, rather—that mine eye should rove

"World-wide and rummage earth, the many-nooked,
Yet find no unit of the human flock
Caught straying but straight comes back hooked and crooked

"By the strong shepherd who, from out his stock
Of aids proceeds to treat each ailing fleece,
Here stimulate to growth, curtail and dock

"There, baldness or excrescence,—that, with grease,
This, with up-grubbing of the bristly patch
Born of the tick-bite. How supreme a peace

"Steals o'er the Statist,—while, in wit, a match
For shrewd Ahithophel, in wisdom . . . well,
His name escapes me—somebody, at watch

"And ward, the fellow of Ahithophel
In guidance of the Chosen!"—at which word
Eyes closed and fast asleep the Rabbi fell.

"Cold weather!" shivered Tsaddik. "Yet the hoard
Of the sagacious ant shows garnered grain,
Ever abundant most when fields afford

"Least pasture, and alike disgrace the plain
Tall tree and lowly shrub. 'Tis so with us
Mortals: our age stores wealth ye seek in vain

"While busy youth culls just what we discuss
At leisure in the last days: and the last
Truly are these for Jochanan, whom thus

"I make one more appeal to! Thine amassed
Experience, now or never, let escape
Some portion of! For I perceive aghast

"The end approaches, while they jeer and jape,
These sons of Shimei: 'Justify your boast!
What have ye gained from Death by twelve months' rape?'

"Statesman, what cure hast thou for—least and most—
Popular grievances? What nostrum, say,
Will make the Rich and Poor, expertly dosed,

"Forget disparity, bid each go gay
That, with his bauble,—with his burden, this?
Propose an alkahest shall melt away

"Men's lacquer, show by prompt analysis
Which is the metal, which the make-believe,
So that no longer brass shall find, gold miss

"Coinage and currency? Make haste, retrieve
The precious moments, Master!" Whereunto
There snarls an "Ever laughing in thy sleeve,

"Pert Tsaddik? Youth indeed sees plain a clue
To guide man where life's wood is intricate:
How shall he fail to thrid its thickest through

"When every oak-trunk takes the eye? Elate
He goes from bole to brushwood, plunging finds—
Smothered in briars—that the small's the great!

"All men are men: I would all minds were minds!
Whereas 'tis just the many's mindless mass
That most needs helping: labourers and hinds

"We legislate for—not the cultured class
Which law-makes for itself nor needs the whip
And bridle,—proper help for mule and ass,

"Did the brutes know! In vain our statesmanship
Strives at contenting the rough multitude:
Still the ox cries 'Tis me thou shouldst equip

"'With equine trappings!' or, in humbler mood,
'Cribful of corn for me! and, as for work—
Adequate rumination o'er my food!'

"Better remain a Poet! Needs it irk
Such an one if light, kindled in his sphere,
Fail to transfuse the Mizraim cold and murk

"Round about Goshen? Though light disappear,
Shut inside,—temporary ignorance
Got outside of, lo, light emerging clear

"Shows each astonished starer the expanse
Of heaven made bright with knowledge! That's the way,
The only way—I see it at a glance—

"To legislate for earth! As poet. . . . Stay!
What is . . . I would that . . . were it . . .
I had been . . .
O sudden change, as if my arid clay

"Burst into bloom! . . ." "A change indeed, I ween,
And change the last!" sighed Tsaddik as he kissed
The closing eyelids. "Just as those serene

"Princes of Night apprised me! Our acquist
Of life is spent, since corners only four
Hath Aisch, and each in turn was made desist

"In passage round the Pole (O Mishna's lore—
Little it profits here!) by strenuous tug
Of friends who eked out thus to full fourscore

"The Rabbi's years. I see each shoulder shrug!
What have we gained? Away the Bier may roll!
To-morrow, when the Master's grave is dug,

"In with his body I may pitch the scroll
I hoped to glorify with, text and gloss,
My Science of Man's Life: one blank's the whole!

"Love, war, song, statesmanship—no gain, all loss,
The stars' bestowment! We on our return
To-morrow merely find—not gold but dross,

"The body not the soul. Come, friends, we learn
At least thus much by our experiment—
That—that . . . well, find what, whom it may concern!"

But next day through the city rumours went
Of a new persecution; so, they fled
All Israel, each man,—this time,—from his tent,

Tsaddik among the foremost. When, the dread
Subsiding, Israel ventured back again
Some three months after, to the cave they sped

Where lay the Sage,—a reverential train!
Tsaddik first enters. "What is this I view?
The Rabbi still alive? No stars remain

"Of Aisch to stop within their courses. True,
I mind me, certain gamesome boys must urge
Their offerings on me: can it be—one threw

"Life at him and it stuck? There needs the scourge
To teach that urchin manners! Prithee, grant
Forgiveness if we pretermit thy dirge

"Just to explain no friend was ministrant,
This time, of life to thee! Some jackanapes,
I gather, has presumed to foist his scant

"Scurvy unripe existence—wilding grapes
Grass-green and sorrel-sour—on that grand wine,
Mighty as mellow, which, so fancy shapes

"May fitly image forth this life of thine
Fed on the last low fattening lees—condensed
Elixir, no milk-mildness of the vine!

"Rightly with Tsaddik wert thou now incensed
Had he been witting of the mischief wrought
When, for elixir, verjuice he dispensed!"

And slowly woke,—like Shushan's flower[1] besought
By over-curious handling to unloose
The curtained secrecy wherein she thought

Her captive bee, mid store of sweets to choose,
Would loll, in gold pavilioned lie unteased,
Sucking on, sated never,—whose, O whose

Might seem that countenance, uplift, all eased
Of old distraction and bewilderment,
Absurdly happy? "How ye have appeased

[1] The lily.

"The strife within me, bred this whole content,
This utter acquiescence in my past,
Present and future life,—by whom was lent

"The power to work this miracle at last,—
Exceeds my guess. Though—*ignorance confirmed*
By knowledge sounds like paradox, I cast

"Vainly about to tell you—fitlier termed—
Of calm struck by encountering opposites,
Each nullifying either! Henceforth wormed

"From out my heart is every snake that bites
The dove that else would brood there: doubt, which kills
With hiss of 'What if sorrows end delights?'

"Fear which stings ease with 'Work the Master wills!'
Experience which coils round and strangles quick
Each hope with 'Ask the Past if hoping skills

"'To work accomplishment, or proves a trick
Wiling thee to endeavour! Strive, fool, stop
Nowise, so live, so die—that's law! why kick

"'Against the pricks?' All out-wormed! Slumber, drop
Thy films once more and veil the bliss within!
Experience strangle hope? Hope waves a-top

"Her wings triumphant! Come what will, I win,
Whoever loses! Every dream's assured
Of soberest fulfilment. Where's a sin

"Except in doubting that the light, which lured
The unwary into darkness, meant no wrong
Had I but marched on bold, nor paused immured

"By mists I should have pressed thro', passed along
My way henceforth rejoicing? Not the boy's
Passionate impulse he conceits so strong,

"Which, at first touch, truth, bubble-like, destroys,—
Not the man's slow conviction 'Vanity
Of vanities—alike my griefs and joys!'

"Ice!—thawed (look up) each bird, each insect by—
(Look round) by all the plants that break in bloom,
(Look down) by every dead friend's memory

"That smiles 'Am I the dust within my tomb?'
Not either, but both these—amalgam rare—
Mix in a product, not from Nature's womb,

"But stuff which He the Operant—who shall dare
Describe His operation?—strikes alive
And thaumaturgic. I nor know nor care

"How from this tohu-bohu[1]—hopes which dive,
And fears which soar—faith, ruined through and through
By doubt, and doubt, faith treads to dust—revive

"In some surprising sort,—as see, they do!—
Not merely foes no longer but fast friends.
What does it mean unless—O strange and new

"Discovery!—this life proves a wine-press—blends
Evil and good, both fruits of Paradise,
Into a novel drink which—who intends

"To quaff, must bear a brain for ecstasies
Attempered, not this all-inadequate
Organ which, quivering within me, dies

"—Nay, lives!—what, how,—too soon, or else too late—
I was—I am . . ." ("He babbleth!" Tsaddik mused)
"O Thou Almighty who canst re-instate

"Truths in their primal clarity, confused
By man's perception, which is man's and made
To suit his service,—how, once disabused

"Of reason which sees light half shine half shade,
Because of flesh, the medium that adjusts
Purity to his visuals, both an aid

"And hindrance,—how to eyes earth's air encrusts,
When purged and perfect to receive truth's beam
Pouring itself on the new sense it trusts

"With all its plenitude of power,—how seen
The intricacies now, of shade and shine,
Oppugnant natures—Right and Wrong, we deem

"Irreconcilable? O eyes of mine,
Freed now of imperfection, ye avail
To see the whole sight, nor may uncombine

"Henceforth what, erst divided, caused you quail—
So huge the chasm between the false and true,
The dream and the reality! All hail,

"Day of my soul's deliverance—day the new,
The never-ending! What though every shape
Whereon I wreaked my yearning to pursue

"Even to success each semblance of escape
From my own bounded self to some all-fair
All-wise external fancy, proved a rape

"Like that old giant's, feigned of fools—on air,
Not solid flesh? How otherwise? To love—
That lesson was to learn not here—but there—

"On earth, not here! Tis there we learn,—there prove
Our parts upon the stuff we needs must spoil,
Striving at mastery, there bend above

[1] Void and waste.

"The spoiled clay potsherds, many a year of toil
Attests the potter tried his hand upon,
Till sudden he arose, wiped free from soil

"His hand cried 'So much for attempt—anon
Performance! Taught to mould the living vase,
What matter the cracked pitchers dead and gone?'

"Could I impart and could thy mind embrace
The secret, Tsaddik!" "Secret none to me!"
Quoth Tsaddik, as the glory on the face

Of Jochanan was quenched. "The truth I see
Of what that excellence of Judah wrote,
Doughty Halaphta. This a case must be

"Wherein, though the last breath have passed the throat,
So that 'The man is dead' we may pronounce,
Yet is the Ruach—(thus do we denote

"The imparted Spirit)—in no haste to bounce
From its entrusted Body,—some three days
Lingers ere it relinquish to the pounce

"Of hawk-clawed Death his victim. Further says
Halaphta, 'Instances have been, and yet
Again may be, when saints, whose earthly ways

"'Tend to perfection, very nearly get
To heaven while still on earth: and, as a fine
Interval shows where waters pure have met

"'Waves brackish, in a mixture, sweet with brine,
That's neither sea nor river but a taste
Of both—so meet the earthly and divine

"'And each is either.' Thus I hold him graced—
Dying on earth, half inside and half out,
Wholly in heaven, who knows? My mind embraced

"Thy secret, Jochanan, how dare I doubt?
Follow thy Ruach, let earth, all it can,
Keep of the leavings!" Thus was brought about

The sepulture of Rabbi Jochanan:
Thou hast him,—sinner-saint, live-dead, boy-man,—
Schiphaz, on Bendimir, in Farzistan!

NOTE. — This story can have no better authority than that of the treatise, existing dispersedly in fragments of Rabbinical writing, משך של רבים ברים, from which I might have helped myself more liberally. Thus, instead of the simple reference to "Moses' stick,"—but what if I make amends by attempting three illustrations, when some thirty might be composed on the same subject, equally justifying that pithy proverb ממשה עד משה לא קם כמשה.

I.

MOSES the Meek was thirty cubits high,
The staff he strode with—thirty cubits long:
And when he leapt, so muscular and strong
Was Moses that his leaping neared the sky
By thirty cubits more: we learn thereby
He reached full ninety cubits—am I wrong?—
When, in a fight slurred o'er by sacred song,
With staff outstretched he took a leap to try
The just dimensions of the giant Og.
And yet he barely touched — this marvel lacked
Posterity to crown earth's catalogue
Of marvels—barely touched—to be exact—
The giant's ankle-bone, remained a frog
That fain would match an ox in stature: fact!

II.

And this same fact has met with unbelief!
How saith a certain traveller? "Young, I chanced
To come upon an object—if thou canst,
Guess me its name and nature! 'Twas, in brief,
White, hard, round, hollow, of such length, in chief,
—And this is what especially enhanced
My wonder—that it seemed, as I advanced,
Never to end. Bind up within thy sheaf
Of marvels, this—Posterity! I walked
From end to end, — four hours walked I, who go
A goodly pace,—and found—I have not baulked
Thine expectation, Stranger? Ay or No?
'Twas but Og's thigh-bone, all the while, I stalked
Alongside of: respect to Moses, though!"

III.

Og's thigh-bone—if ye deem its measure strange,
Myself can witness to much length of shank
Even in birds. Upon a water's bank
Once halting, I was minded to exchange
Noon heat for cool. Quoth I "On many a grange
I have seen storks perch—legs both long and lank:
Yon stork's must touch the bottom of this tank,
Since on its top doth wet no plume derange
Of the smooth breast. I'll bathe there!" "Do not so!"
Warned me a voice from heaven. "A man let drop
His axe into that shallow rivulet—
As thou accountest—seventy years ago:
It fell and fell and still without a stop
Keeps falling, nor has reached the bottom yet."

[*Note.*—Dr. Berdoe says the *Hebrew* in this note means—the first quotation, "Collection of Many Fables;" and the second, "From Moses to Moses (Maimonides) there was never one like Moses."]

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE.

NEVER the time and the place
And the loved one all together!
This path—how soft to pace!
This May—what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
This path so soft to pace shall lead
Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers: we—
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
—I and she!

PAMBO.

[Pambo was a monk of the Desert in the time of St. Anthony, who, after learning the first verse of the 39th Psalm, refused to learn any more, saying that one was enough for him if he learnt it properly. The poem is apparently based on a passage in Socrates' "Ecclesiastical History," Book iv. c. 18. In Butler's "Lives of the Saints" there is a glowing account of St. Pambo.]

SUPPOSE that we part (work done, comes play)
With a grave tale told in crambo
—As our hearty sires were wont to say—
Whereof the hero is Pambo?

Do you happen to know who Pambo was?
Nor I—but this much have heard of him:
He entered one day a college-class,
And asked—was it so absurd of him?—

"May Pambo learn wisdom ere practise it?
In wisdom I fain would ground me:
Since wisdom is centred in Holy Writ,
Some psalm to the purpose expound me!"

"That psalm," the Professor smiled, "shall be
Untroubled by doubt which dirtieth
Pellucid streams when an ass like thee
Would drink there—the Nine-and-thirtieth.

"Verse first: *I said I will look to my ways*
That I with my tongue offend not.
How now? Why stare? Art struck in amaze?
Stop, stay! The smooth line hath an end knot!

"He's gone!—disgusted my text should prove
Too easy to need explaining?
Had he waited, the blockhead might find I move
To matter that pays remaining!"

Long years went by, when—"Ha, who's this?
Do I come on the restive scholar
I had driven to Wisdom's goal, I wis,
But that he slipped the collar?

"What? Arms crossed, brow bent, thought-immersed?
A student indeed! Why scruple
To own that the lesson proposed him first
Scarce suited so apt a pupil?

"Come back! From the beggarly elements
To a more recondite issue
We pass till we reach, at all events,
Some point that may puzzle . . . Why 'pish' you?"

From the ground looked piteous up the head:
"Daily and nightly, Master,
Your pupil plods thro' that text you read,
Yet gets on never the faster.

"At the self-same stand,—now old, then young!
I will look to my ways—were doing
As easy as saying!—*that I with my tongue*
Offend not—and 'scape pooh-poohing

"From sage and simple, doctor and dunce?
Ah, nowise! Still doubts so muddy
The stream I would drink at once,—but once!
That—thus I resume my study!"

Brother, brother, I share the blame,
Arcades sumus ambo!
Darkling, I keep my sunrise-aim,
Lack not the critic's flambeau,
And *look to my ways*, yet, much the same,
Offend with my tongue—like Pambo!

FERISHTAH'S FANCIES.

1884.

[Ferishtah is the name of a Persian historian of the seventeenth century, but the poet has not done more than make use of the historian's name. There is no Persian poet called Ferishtah, and the stories are all inventions.]

"His genius was jocular, but, when disposed, he could be very serious."—Article "Shakespear," JEREMY COLLIER'S *Historical &c. Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1701.

"You, Sir, I entertain you for one of my Hundred; only, I do not like the fashion of your garments: you will say they are Persian: but let them be changed."—*King Lear*, act iii. sc. 6.

PROLOGUE.

PRAY, Reader, have you eaten ortolans
Ever in Italy?
Recall how cooks there cook them: for my plan's
To—Lyre with Spit ally.
They pluck the birds,—some dozen luscious lumps,
Or more or fewer,—
Then roast them, heads by heads and rumps by rumps,
Stuck on a skewer.
But first,—and here's the point I fain would press,—
Don't think I'm tattling!—
They interpose, to curb its lusciousness,
—What, 'twixt each fatling?
First comes plain bread, crisp, brown, a toasted square:
Then, a strong sage-leaf:
(So we find books with flowers dried here and there
Lest leaf engage leaf.)
First, food—then, piquancy—and last of all
Follows the thirdling:
Through wholesome hard, sharp soft, your tooth must bite
Ere reach the birdling.
Now, were there only crust to crunch, you'd wince:
Unpalatable!
Sage-leaf is bitter-pungent—so's a quince:
Eat each who's able!
But through all three bite boldly—lo, the gust!
Flavour—no fixture—
Flies, permeating flesh and leaf and crust
In fine admixture.
So with your meal, my poem: masticate
Sense, sight and song there!
Digest these, and I praise your peptics' state,
Nothing found wrong there.
Whence springs my illustration who can tell?
—The more surprising
That here eggs, milk, cheese, fruit suffice so well
For gormandizing.
A fancy-freak by contrast born of thee,
Delightful Gressoney!
Who laughest "Take what is, trust what may be!"
That's Life's true lesson,—eh?

MAISON DELAPIERRE,
GRESSONEY ST. JEAN, VAL D'AOSTA,
September 12, 83.

THE EAGLE.

DERVISH—(though yet un-dervished, call him so
No less beforehand: while he drudged our way,
Other his worldly name was: when he wrote
Those versicles we Persians praise him for,
—True fairy-work—Ferishtah grew his style)—

Dervish Ferishtah walked the woods one eve,
And noted on a bough a raven's nest
Whereof each youngling gaped with callow beak
Widened by want; for way? beneath the tree
Dead lay the mother-bird. "A piteous chance!
"How shall they 'scape destruction?" sighed the sage
—Or sage about to be, though simple still.
Responsive to which doubt, sudden there swooped
An eagle downward, and behold he bore
(Great-hearted) in his talons flesh wherewith
He stayed their craving, then resought the sky.
"Ah, foolish, faithless me!" the observer smiled,
"Who toil and moil to eke out life, when lo
Providence cares for every hungry mouth!"
To profit by which lesson, home went he,
And certain days sat musing,—neither meat
Nor drink would purchase by his handiwork.
Then,—for his head swam and his limbs grew faint,—
Sleep overtook the unwise one, whom in dream
God thus admonished: "Hast thou marked my deed?
Which part assigned by providence dost judge
Was meant for man's example? Should he play
The helpless weakling, or the helpful strength
That captures prey and saves the perishing?
Sluggard, arise: work, eat, then feed who lack!"

Waking, "I have arisen, work I will,
Eat, and so following. Which lacks food the more,
Body or soul in me? I starve in soul:
So may mankind: and since men congregate
In towns, not woods,—to Ispahan forthwith!"

Round us the wild creatures, overhead the trees,
Underfoot the moss-tracks,—life and love with these!
I to wear a fawn-skin, thou to dress in flowers:
All the long lone Summer-day, that greenwood life of ours!
Rich-pavilioned, rather,—still the world without,—
Inside—gold-roofed silk-walled silence round about!
Queen it thou on purple,—I, at watch and ward
Couched beneath the columns, gaze, thy slave, love's guard!

So, for us no world? Let throngs press thee to me!
Up and down amid men, heart by heart fare we!
Welcome squalid vesture, harsh voice, hateful face!
God is soul, souls I and thou: with souls should souls have place.

THE MELON-SELLER.

GOING his rounds one day in Ispahan,—
Half-way on Dervishhood, not wholly there,—
Ferishtah, as he crossed a certain bridge,
Came startled on a well-remembered face.
"Can it be? What, turned melon-seller—thou?
Clad in such sordid garb, thy seat yon step
Where dogs brush by thee and express contempt?
Methinks, thy head-gear is some scooped-out gourd!
Nay, sunk to slicing up, for readier sale,
One fruit whereof the whole scarce feeds a swine?
Wast thou the Shah's Prime Minister, men saw
Ride on his right-hand while a trumpet blew
And Persia hailed the Favourite? Yea, twelve years
Are past, I judge, since that transcendency,
And thou didst peculate and art abased;
No less, twelve years since, thou didst hold in hand
Persia, couldst halve and quarter, mince its pulp
As pleased thee, and distribute—melon-like—
Portions to whoso played the parasite,
Or suck—thyself—each juicy morsel. How
Enormous thy abjection,—hell from heaven,
Made tenfold hell by contrast! Whisper me!
Dost thou curse God for granting twelve years' bliss
Only to prove this day's the direr lot?"

Whereon the beggar raised a brow, once more
Luminous and imperial, from the rags.
"Fool, does thy folly think my foolishness
Dwells rather on the fact that God appoints
A day of woe to the unworthy one,
Than that the unworthy one, by God's
award,
Tasted joy twelve years long? Or buy a slice,
Or go to school!"

To school Ferishtah went;
And, schooling ended, passed from Ispahan
To Nishapur, that Elburz looks above
—Where they dig turquoise: there kept school
himself,
The melon-seller's speech, his stock in trade.
Some say a certain Jew adduced the word
Out of their book, it sounds so much the same,
את־הטוב נקבל מאת האלהים
ואת־הרע לא נקבל: In Persian phrase,
"Shall we receive good at the hand of God
And evil not receive?" But great wits jump.

Wish no word unspoken, want no look away!
What if words were but mistake, and looks—
too sudden, say!
Be unjust for once, Love! Bear it—well I may!

Do me justice always? Bid my heart—their
shrine—
Render back its store of gifts, old looks and
words of thine
—Oh, so all unjust—the less deserved, the
more divine?

SHAH ABBAS.

ANYHOW, once full Dervish, youngsters came
To gather up his own words, 'neath a rock
Or else a palm, by pleasant Nishapur.

Said someone, as Ferishtah paused abrupt,
Reading a certain passage from the roll
Wherein is treated of Lord Ali's life:
"Master, explain this incongruity!
When I dared question 'It is beautiful,
But is it true?'—thy answer was 'In truth
Lives beauty.' I persisting—'Beauty—yes,
In thy mind and in my mind, every mind
That apprehends: but outside—so to speak—
Did beauty live in deed as well as word,
Was this life lived, was this death-died—not
dreamed?'
'Many attested it for fact' saidst thou.
'Many!' but mark, Sir! Half as long ago
As such things were,—supposing that they
were,—
Reigned great Shah Abbas: he too lived
and died
—How say they? Why, so strong of arm,
of foot
So swift, he stayed a lion in his leap
On a stag's haunch,—with one hand grasped
the stag,
With one struck down the lion: yet, no
less,
Himself, that same day, feasting after sport,
Perceived a spider drop into his wine,
Let fall the flagon, died of simple fear.
So all say,—so dost thou say?"

"Wherefore not?"
Ferishtah smiled: "though strange, the
story stands
Clear-chronicled: none tells it otherwise:
The fact's eye-witness bore the cup, beside."

"And dost thou credit one cup-bearer's tale,
False, very like, and futile certainly,
Yet hesitate to trust what many tongues
Combine to testify was beautiful
In deed as well as word? No fool's report
Of lion, stag and spider, but immense
With meaning for mankind,—thy race,—thy-
self?"

Whereto the Dervish: "First amend, my son,
Thy faulty nomenclature, call belief
Belief indeed, nor grace with such a name
The easy acquiescence of mankind
In matters nowise worth dispute, since life
Lasts merely the allotted moment. Lo—
That lion-stag-and-spider tale leaves fixed
The fact for us that somewhen Abbas reigned,
Died, somehow slain,—a useful registry,—

Which therefore we—'believe'? Stand
forward, thou,
My Yakub, son of Yusuf, son of Zal!
I advertise thee that our liege, the Shah
Happily regnant, hath become assured,
By opportune discovery, that thy sires,
Son by the father upwards, track their line
To—whom but that same bearer of the cup
Whose inadvertency was chargeable
With what therefrom ensued, disgust and
death
To Abbas Shah, the over-nice of soul?
Whence he appoints thee,—such his clem-
ency,—
Not death, thy due, but just a double tax
To pay, on thy particular bed of reeds
Which flower into the brush that makes a
broom
Fit to sweep ceilings clear of vermin. Sure,
Thou dost believe the story nor dispute
That punishment should signalize its truth?
Down therefore with some twelve dinars!
Why start,
—The stag's way with the lion hard on
haunch?
'Believe the story?'—how thy words throng
fast!—
'Who saw this, heard this, said this, wrote
down this,
That and the other circumstance to prove
So great a prodigy surprised the world?
Needs must thou prove me fable can be fact
Or ere thou coax one piece from out my
pouch!'"

"There we agree, Sir: neither of us knows,
Neither accepts that tale on evidence
Worthy to warrant the large word—belief.
Now I get near thee! Why didst pause
abrupt,
Disabled by emotion at a tale
Might match—be frank!—for credibility
The figment of the spider and the cup?
—To wit, thy roll's concerning Ali's life,
Unevidenced—thine own word! Little boots
Our sympathy with fiction! When I read
The annals and consider of Tahmasp
And that sweet sun-surpassing star his love,
I weep like a cut vine-twig, though aware
Zurah's sad fate is fiction, since the snake
He saw devour her,—how could such exist,
Having nine heads? No snake boasts more
than three!
I weep, then laugh—both actions right alike.
But thou, Ferishtah, sapiency confessed,
When at the Day of Judgment God shall ask
'Didst thou believe?'—what wilt thou plead?
Thy tears?
(Nay, they fell fast and stain the parchment
still)
What if thy tears meant love? Love lacking
ground
—Belief,—avails thee as it would avail
My own pretence to favour since, forsooth,
I loved the lady—I, who needs must laugh
To hear a snake boasts nine heads: they
have three!"

"Thanks for the well-timed help that's born,
behold,
Out of thy words, my son,—belief and love!
Hast heard of Ishak son of Absal? Ay,
The very same we heard of, ten years since,
Slain in the wars: he comes back safe and
sound,—
Though twenty soldiers saw him die at
Yezdt,—
Just as a single mule-and-baggage boy
Declared 'twas like he some day would,—for
why?
The twenty soldiers lied, he saw him stout,
Cured of all wounds at once by smear of salve,
A Mubid's manufacture: such the tale.
Now, when his pair of sons were thus apprised
Effect was twofold on them. 'Hail!' crowed
This:
'Dearer the news than dayspring after night!
The cure-reporting youngster warrants me
Our father shall make glad our eyes once more,
For whom, had outpoured life of mine sufficed
To bring him back, free broached were every
vein!'
'Avaunt, delusive tale-concocter, news
Cruel as meteor simulating dawn!'
Whimpered the other: 'Who believes this boy
Must disbelieve his twenty seniors: no,

Return our father shall not! Might my death
Purchase his life, how promptly would the dole
Be paid as due!' Well, ten years pass,—aha,
Ishak is marching homeward,—doubts, not he,
Are dead and done with! So, our townsfolk straight
Must take on them to counsel. 'Go thou gay,
Welcome thy father, thou of ready faith!
Hide thee, contrariwise, thou faithless one,
Expect paternal frowning, blame and blows!'
So do our townsfolk counsel: dost demur?"

"Ferishtah like those simpletons—at loss
In what is plain as pikestaff? Pish! Suppose
The trustful son had sighed 'So much the worse!
Returning means—retaking heritage
Enjoyed these ten years, who should say me nay?'
How would such trust reward him? Trustlessness
—O' the other hand—were what procured most praise
To him who judged return impossible,
Yet hated heritage procured thereby.
A fool were Ishak if he failed to prize
Mere head's work less than heart's work: no fool he!'

"Is God less wise? Resume the roll!"
They did.

You groped your way across my room i' the dear dark dead of night;
At each fresh step a stumble was: but, once your lamp alight,
Easy and plain you walked again: so soon all wrong grew right!

What lay on floor to trip your foot? Each object, late awry,
Looked fitly placed, nor proved offence to footing free—for why?
The lamp showed all, discordant late, grown simple symmetry.
Be love your light and trust your guide, with these explore my heart!
No obstacle to trip you then, strike hands and souls apart!
Since rooms and hearts are furnished so,—light shows you,—needs love start?

THE FAMILY.

A CERTAIN neighbour lying sick to death,
Ferishtah grieved beneath a palm-tree, whence
He rose at peace: whereat objected one
"Gudarz our friend gasps in extremity.
Sure, thou art ignorant how close at hand
Death presses, or the cloud, which fouled so late
Thy face, had deepened down not lightened off."

"I judge there will be respite, for I prayed."

"Sir, let me understand, of charity!
Yestereve, what was thine admonishment?
'All-wise, all-good, all-mighty—God is such!'
How then should man, the all-unworthy, dare
Propose to set aside a thing ordained?
To pray means—substitute man's will for God's:
Two best wills cannot be: by consequence,
What is man bound to but—assent, say I?
Rather to rapture of thanksgiving; since
That which seems worst to man to God is best,
So, because God ordains it, best to man.
Yet man—the foolish, weak and wicked—prays!
Urges 'My best were better, didst Thou know'!"

"List to a tale. A worthy householder
Of Shiraz had three sons, beside a spouse
Whom, cutting gourds, a serpent bit, whereon
The offended limb swelled black from foot to fork.
The husband called in aid a leech renowned
World-wide, confessed the lord of surgery,
And bade him dictate—who forthwith declared
'Sole remedy is amputation.' Straight

The husband sighed 'Thou knowest: be it so!'
His three sons heard their mother sentenced: 'Pause!'
Outbroke the elder: 'Be precipitate
Nowise, I pray thee! Take some gentler way,
Thou sage of much resource! I will not doubt
But science still may save foot, leg and thigh!'
The next in age snapped petulant: 'Too rash!
No reason for this maiming! What, Sir Leech,
Our parent limps henceforward while we leap?
Shame on thee! Save the limb thou must and shalt!'
'Shame on yourselves, ye bold ones!' followed up
The brisk third brother, youngest, pertest too:
'The leech knows all things, we are ignorant;
What he proposes, gratefully accept!
For me, had I some unguent bound to heal
Hurts in a twinkling, hardly would I dare
Essay its virtue and so cross the sage
By cure his skill pronounces folly. Quick!
No waiting longer! There the patient lies:
Out then with implements and operate!'"

"Ah, the young devil!"

"Why, his reason chimed
Right with the Hakim's."

"Hakim's, ay—but chit's?
How? what the skilled eye saw and judged of weight
To overbear a heavy consequence,
That—shall a sciolist affect to see?
All he saw—that is, all such oaf should see,
Was just the mother's suffering."

"In my tale,
Be God the Hakim: in the husband's case,
Call ready acquiescence—aptitude
Angelic, understanding swift and sure:
Call the first son—a wise humanity,
Slow to conceive but duteous to adopt:
See in the second son—humanity,
Wrong-headed yet right-hearted, rash but kind.
Last comes the cackler of the brood, our chit
Who, aping wisdom all beyond his years,
Thinks to discard humanity itself:
Fares like the beast which should affect to fly
Because a bird with wings may spurn the ground,
So, missing heaven and losing earth—drops how
But hell-ward? No, be man and nothing more—
Man who, as man conceiving, hopes and fears,
And craves and deprecates, and loves, and loathes,
And bids God help him, till death touch his eyes
And show God granted most, denying all."

Man I am and man would be, Love—merest man and nothing more.
Bid me seem no other! Eagles boast of pinions—let them soar!
I may put forth angel's plumage, once unmanned, but not before.

Now on earth, to stand suffices,—nay, if kneeling serves, to kneel:
Here you front me, here I find the all of heaven that earth can feel:
Sense looks straight,—not over, under,—perfect sees beyond appeal.

Good you are and wise, full circle: what to me were more outside?
Wiser wisdom, better goodness? Ah, such want the angel's wide
Sense to take and hold and keep them! Mine at least has never tried.

THE SUN.

"AND what might that bold man's announcement be"—
Ferishtah questioned—"which so moved thine ire
That thou didst curse, nay, cuff and kick—in short,
Confute the announcer? Wipe those drops away
Which start afresh upon thy face at mere
Mention of such enormity: now, speak!"

"He scrupled not to say—(thou warrantest,
O patient Sir, that I unblamed repeat
Abominable words which blister tongue?)
God once assumed on earth a human shape:
(Lo, I have spitten!) Dared I ask the grace,
Fain would I hear, of thy subtility,
From out what hole in man's corrupted heart
Creeps such a maggot: fancies verminous
Breed in the clots there, but a monster born
Of pride and folly like this pest—thyself
Only canst trace to egg-shell it hath chipped."

The sun rode high. "During our ignorance"—
Began Ferishtah—"folk esteemed as God
Yon orb: for argument, suppose him so,—
Be it the symbol, not the symbolized,
I and thou safelier take upon our lips.
Accordingly, yon orb that we adore
—What is he? Author of all light and life:
Such one must needs be somewhere: this is he.
Like what? If I may trust my human eyes,
A ball composed of spirit-fire, whence springs
—What, from this ball, my arms could circle round?
All I enjoy on earth. By consequence,
Inspiring me with—what? Why, love and praise.
I eat a palatable fig—there's love
In little: who first planted what I pluck,
Obtains my little praise, too: more of both
Keeps due proportion with more cause for each:
So, more and ever more, till most of all
Completes experience, and the orb, descried
Ultimate giver of all good, perforce
Gathers unto himself all love, all praise,
Is worshipped—which means loved and praised at height.
Back to the first good: 'twas the gardener gave
Occasion to my palate's pleasure: grace,
Plain on his part, demanded thanks on mine.
Go up above this giver,—step by step,
Gain a conception of what—(how and why,
Matters not now)—occasioned him to give,
Appointed him the gardener of the ground,—
I mount by just progression slow and sure
To some prime giver—here assumed yon orb—
Who takes my worship. Whom have I in mind,
Thus worshipping, unless a man, my like
Howe'er above me? Man, I say—how else,
I being man who worship? Here's my hand
Lifts first a mustard-seed, then weight on weight
Greater and ever greater, till at last
It lifts a melon, I suppose, then stops—
Hand-strength expended wholly: so, my love
First lauds the gardener for the fig his gift,
Then, looking higher, loves and lauds still more,
Who hires the ground, who owns the ground, Sheikh, Shah,
On and away, away and ever on,
Till, at the last, it loves and lauds the orb
Ultimate cause of all to laud and love.
Where is the break, the change of quality
In hand's power, soul's impulsion? Gift was grace,
The greatest as the smallest. Had I stopped
Anywhere in the scale, stayed love and praise
As so far only fit to follow gift,
Saying 'I thanked the gardener for his fig,
But now that, lo, the Shah has filled my purse
With tomans which avail to purchase me
A fig-tree forest, shall I pay the same
With love and praise, the gardener's proper fee?'
Justly would whoso bears a brain object
'Giving is giving, gift claims gift's return,
Do thou thine own part, therefore: let the Shah
Ask more from who has more to pay.' Perchance
He gave me from his treasure less by much
Than the soil's servant: let that be! My part
Is plain—to meet and match the gift and gift
With love and love, with praise and praise, till both
Cry 'All of us is thine, we can no more!'
So shall I do man's utmost—man to man:

For as our liege the Shah's sublime estate
Merely enhaloes, leaves him man the same,
So must I count that orb I call a fire
(Keep to the language of our ignorance)
Something that's fire and more beside. Mere fire
—Is it a force which, giving, knows it gives,
And wherefore, so may look for love and praise
From me, fire's like so far, however less
In all beside? Prime cause this fire shall be,
Uncaused, all-causing: hence begin the gifts,
Thither must go my love and praise—to what?
Fire? Symbol fitly serves the symbolized
Herein,—that this same object of my thanks,
While to my mind nowise conceivable
Except as mind no less than fire, refutes
Next moment mind's conception: fire is fire—
While what I needs must thank, must needs include
Purpose with power,—humanity like mine,
Imagined, for the dear necessity,
One moment in an object which the next
Confesses unimaginable. Power!
—What need of will, then? nought opposes power:
Why, purpose? any change must be for worse:
And what occasion for beneficence
When all that is, so is and so must be?
Best being best now, change were for the worse.
Accordingly discard these qualities
Proper to imperfection, take for type
Mere fire, eject the man, retain the orb,—
The perfect and, so, inconceivable,—
And what remains to love and praise? A stone
Fair-coloured proves a solace to my eye,
Rolled by my tongue brings moisture curing drouth,
And struck by steel emits a useful spark:
Shall I return it thanks, the insentient thing?
No,—man once, man for ever—man in soul
As man in body: just as this can use
Its proper senses only, see and hear,
Taste, like or loathe according to its law
And not another creature's,—even so
Man's soul is moved by what, if it in turn
Must move, is kindred soul: receiving good
—Man's way—must make man's due acknowledgment,
No other, even while he reasons out
Plainly enough that, were the man unmanned,
Made angel of, angelic every way,
The love and praise that rightly seek and find
Their man-like object now,—instructed more,
Would go forth idly, air to emptiness.
Our human flower, sun-ripened, proffers scent
Though reason prove the sun lacks nose to feed
On what himself made grateful: flower and man,
Let each assume that scent and love alike
Being once born, must needs have use! Man's part
Is plain—to send love forth,—astray, perhaps:
No matter, he has done his part."

"Wherefrom
What is to follow—if I take thy sense—
But that the sun—the inconceivable
Confessed by man—comprises, all the same,
Man's every-day conception of himself—
No less remaining unconceived!"

"Agreed"!

"Yet thou, insisting on the right of man
To feel as man, not otherwise,—man, bound
By man's conditions neither less nor more,
Obliged to estimate as fair or foul,
Right, wrong, good, evil, what man's faculty
Adjudges such,—how canst thou,—plainly bound
To take man's truth for truth and only truth,—
Dare to accept, in just one case, as truth
Falsehood confessed? Flesh simulating fire—
Our fellow-man whom we his fellows know
For dust—instinct with fire unknowable!
Where's thy man-needed truth—its proof, nay print
Of faintest passage on the tablets traced
By man, termed knowledge? 'Tis conceded thee,
We lack such fancied union—fire with flesh:

But even so, to lack is not to gain
Our lack's suppliance: where's the trace of such
Recorded?"

"What if such a tracing were?
If some strange story stood,—whate'er its worth,—
That the immensely yearned-for, once befell,
—The sun was flesh once?—(keep the figure!)"

"How?
An union inconceivable was fact?"

"Son, if the stranger have convinced himself
Fancy is fact—the sun, besides a fire,
Holds earthly substance somehow fire pervades
And yet consumes not,—earth, he understands,
With essence he remains a stranger to,—
Fitlier thou saidst 'I stand appalled before
Conception unattainable by me
Who need it most'—than this—'What? boast he holds
Conviction where I see conviction's need,
Alas,—and nothing else? then what remains
But that I straightway curse, cuff, kick the fool!'"

Fire is in the flint: true, once a spark escapes,
Fire forgets the kinship, soars till fancy shapes
Some befitting cradle where the babe had birth—
Wholly heaven's the product, unallied to earth.
Splendours recognized as perfect in the star!—
In our flint their home was, housed as now they are.

MIHRAB SHAH.

QUOTH an inquirer, "Praise the Merciful!
My thumb which yesterday a scorpion nipped—
(It swelled and blackened)—lo, is sound again!
By application of a virtuous root
The burning has abated: that is well:
But now methinks I have a mind to ask,—
Since this discomfort came of culling herbs
Nor meaning harm,—why needs a scorpion be?
Yea, there began, from when my thumb last throbbed,
Advance in question framing, till I asked
Wherefore should any evil hap to man—
From ache of flesh to agony of soul—
Since God's All-mercy mates All-potency?
Nay, why permits He evil to Himself—
Man's sin, accounted such? Suppose a world
Purged of all pain, with fit inhabitant—
Man pure of evil in thought, word and deed—
Were it not well? Then, wherefore otherwise?
Too good result? But He is wholly good!
Hard to effect? Ay, were He impotent!
Teach me, Ferishtah!"

Said the Dervish: "Friend,
My chance, escaped to-day, was worse than thine:
I, as I woke this morning, raised my head,
Which never tumbled but stuck fast on neck.
Was not I glad and thankful!"

"How could head
Tumble from neck, unchopped—inform me first!
Unless we take Firdausi's tale for truth,
Who ever heard the like?"

"The like might hap
By natural law: I let my staff fall thus—
It goes to ground, I know not why. Suppose,
Whene'er my hold was loosed, it skyward sprang
As certainly, and all experience proved
That, just as staves when unsupported sink,
So, unconfined, they soar?"

"Let such be law—
Why, a new chapter of sad accidents
Were added to humanity's mischance,
No doubt at all, and as a man's false step
Now lays him prone on earth, contrariwise,

Removal from his shoulder of a weight
Might start him upwards to perdition. Ay!
But, since such law exists in just thy brain,
I shall not hesitate to doff my cap
For fear my head take flight."

"Nor feel relief
Finding it firm on shoulder. Tell me, now!
What were the bond 'twixt man and man, dost judge,
Pain once abolished? Come, be true! Our Shah—
How stands he in thy favour? Why that shrug?
Is not he lord and ruler?"

"Easily!
His mother bore him, first of those four wives
Provided by his father, such his luck:
Since when his business simply was to breathe
And take each day's new bounty. There he stands—
Where else had I stood, were his birth-star mine?
No, to respect men's power, I needs must see
Men's bare hands seek, find, grasp and wield the sword
Nobody else can brandish! Bless his heart,
'Tis said, he scarcely counts his fingers right!"

"Well, then—his princely doles! from every feast
Off go the feasted with the dish they ate
And cup they drank from,—nay, a change besides
Of garments" . . .

"Sir, put case, for service done,—
Or best, for love's sake,—such and such a slave
Sold his allowance of sour lentil soup
To therewith purchase me a pipe-stick,—nay,
If he, by but one hour, cut short his sleep
To clout my shoe,—that were a sacrifice!"

"All praise his gracious bearing."

"All praise mine—
Or would praise did they never make approach
Except on all-fours, crawling till I bade
'Now that with eyelids thou hast touched the earth,
Come close and have no fear, poor nothingness!'
What wonder that the lady-rose I woo
And palisade about from every wind,
Holds herself handsomely? The wilding, now,
Ruffled outside at pleasure of the blast,
That still lifts up with something of a smile
Its poor attempt at bloom" . . .

"A blameless life,
Where wrong might revel with impunity—
Remember that!"

"The falcon on his fist—
Reclaimed and trained and belled and beautified
Till she believes herself the Simorgh's match—
She only deigns destroy the antelope,
Stoops at no carrion-crow: thou marvellest?"

"So be it, then! He wakes no love in thee
For any one of divers attributes
Commonly deemed loveworthy. All the same,
I would he were not wasting, slow but sure,
With that internal ulcer" . . .

"Say'st thou so?
How should I guess? Alack, poor soul! But stay—
Sure in the reach of art some remedy
Must lie to hand: or if it lurk,—that leech
Of fame in Tebriz, why not seek his aid?
Couldst not thou, Dervish, counsel in the case?"

"My counsel might be—what imports a pang
The more or less, which puts an end to one
Odious in spite of every attribute
Commonly deemed loveworthy?"

"Attributes?
Faugh!—nay, Ferishtah,—'tis an ulcer, think!
Attributes, quotha? Here's poor flesh and blood,
Like thine and mine and every man's, a prey
To hell-fire! Hast thou lost thy wits for once?"

"Friend, here they are to find and profit by!
Put pain from out the world, what room were left
For thanks to God, for love to Man? Why thanks,—
Except for some escape, whate'er the style,
From pain that might be, name it as thou mayst?
Why love,—when all thy kind, save me, suppose,
Thy father, and thy son, and . . . well, thy dog,
To eke the decent number out—we few
Who happen—like a handful of chance stars
From the unnumbered host—to shine o'erhead
And lend thee light,—our twinkle all thy store,—
We only take thy love! Mankind, forsooth?
Who sympathizes with their general joy
Foolish as undeserved? But pain—see God's
Wisdom at work!—man's heart is made to judge
Pain deserved nowhere by the common flesh
Our birthright,—bad and good deserve alike
No pain, to human apprehension! Lust
Greed, cruelty, injustice, crave (we hold)
Due punishment from somebody, no doubt:
But ulcer in the midriff! that brings flesh
Triumphant from the bar whereto arraigned
Soul quakes with reason. In the eye of God
Pain may have purpose and be justified:
Man's sense avails to only see, in pain,
A hateful chance no man but would avert
Or, failing, needs must pity. Thanks to God
And love to man,—from man take these away,
And what is man worth? Therefore, Mihrab Shah,
Tax me my bread and salt twice over, claim
Laila my daughter for thy sport,—go on!
Slay my son's self, maintain thy poetry
Beats mine,—thou meritest a dozen deaths!
But—ulcer in the stomach,—ah, poor soul,
Try a fig-plaster: may it ease thy pangs!"

So, the head aches and the limbs are faint!
Flesh is a burthen—even to you!
Can I force a smile with a fancy quaint?
Why are my ailments none or few?

In the soul of me sits sluggishness:
Body so strong and will so weak!
The slave stands fit for the labour—yes,
But the master's mandate is still to seek.

You, now—what if the outside clay
Helped, not hindered the inside flame?
My dim to-morrow—your plain to-day,
Yours the achievement, mine the aim?

So were it rightly, so shall it be!
Only, while earth we pace together
For the purpose apportioned you and me,
Closer we tread for a common tether.

You shall sigh "Wait for his sluggish soul!
Shame he should lag, not lamed as I!"
May not I smile "Ungained her goal:
Body may reach her—by-and-by?"

A CAMEL-DRIVER.

"How of his fate, the Pilgrims' soldier-guide
Condemned" (Ferishtah questioned), "for he slew
The merchant whom he convoyed with his bales
—A special treachery?"

"Sir, the proofs were plain:
Justice was satisfied: between two boards
The rogue was sawn asunder, rightly served."

"With all wise men's approval—mine at least."

"Himself, indeed, confessed as much. 'I die
Justly' (groaned he) 'through over-greediness

Which tempted me to rob: but grieve the most
That he who quickened sin at slumber,—ay,
Prompted and pestered me till thought grew deed,—
The same is fled to Syria and is safe,
Laughing at me thus left to pay for both.
My comfort is that God reserves for him
Hell's hottest' . . ."

"Idle words."

"Enlighten me!
Wherefore so idle? Punishment by man
Has thy assent,—the word is on thy lips.
By parity of reason, punishment
By God should likelier win thy thanks and praise."

"Man acts as man must: God, as God beseems.
A camel-driver, when his beast will bite,
Thumps her athwart the muzzle: why?"

"How else
Instruct the creature—mouths should munch, not bite?"

"True, he is man, knows but man's trick to teach.
Suppose some plain word, told her first of all,
Had hindered any biting?"

"Find him such,
And fit the beast with understanding first!
No understanding animals like Rakhsh
Nowadays, Master! Till they breed on earth,
For teaching—blows must serve."

"Who deals the blow—
What if by some rare method,—magic, say,—
He saw into the biter's very soul,
And knew the fault was so repented of
It could not happen twice?"

"That's something: still,
I hear, methinks, the driver say 'No less
Take thy fault's due! Those long-necked sisters, see,
Lean all a-stretch to know if biting meets
Punishment or enjoys impunity.
For their sakes—thwack!'"

"The journey home at end,
The solitary beast safe-stabled now,
In comes the driver to avenge a wrong
Suffered from six months since,—apparently
With patience, nay, approval: when the jaws
Met i' the small of the arm, 'Ha, Ladykin,
Still at thy frolics, girl of gold?' laughed he:
'Eat flesh? Rye-grass content thee rather with,
Whereof accept a bundle!' Now,—what change!
Laughter by no means! Now 'tis 'Fiend, thy frisk
Was fit to find thee provender, didst judge?
Behold this red-hot twy-prong, thus I stick
To hiss i' the soft of thee!'"

"Behold? behold
A crazy noddle, rather! Sure the brute
Might wellnigh have plain speech coaxed out of tongue,
And grow as voluble as Rakhsh himself
At such mad outrage. 'Could I take thy mind,
Guess thy desire? If biting was offence
Wherefore the rye-grass bundle, why each day's
Patting and petting, but to intimate
My playsomeness had pleased thee? Thou endowed
With reason, truly!'"

"Reason aims to raise
Some makeshift scaffold-vantage midway, whence
Man dares, for life's brief moment, peer below:
But ape omniscience? Nay! The ladder lent
To climb by, step and step, until we reach
The little foothold-rise allowed mankind
To mount on and thence guess the sun's survey—
Shall this avail to show us world-wide truth
Stretched for the sun's descrying? Reason bids

'Teach, Man, thy beast his duty first of all
Or last of all, with blows if blows must be,—
How else accomplish teaching?' Reason adds
'Before man's First, and after man's poor Last,
God operated and will operate.'
—Process of which man merely knows this much,—
That nowise it resembles man's at all,
Teaching or punishing."

"It follows, then,
That any malefactor I would smite
With God's allowance, God himself will spare
Presumably. No scapegrace? Then, rejoice
Thou snatch-grace safe in Syria!"

"Friend, such view
Is but man's wonderful and wide mistake.
Man lumps his kind i' the mass: God singles thence
Unit by unit. Thou and God exist—
So think!—for certain: think the mass—mankind—
Disparts, disperses, leaves thyself alone!
Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee,—
Thee and no other,—stand or fall by them!
That is the part for thee: regard all else
For what it may be—Time's illusion. This
Be sure of—ignorance that sins, is safe.
No punishment like knowledge! Instance, now!
My father's choicest treasure was a book
Wherein he, day by day and year by year,
Recorded gains of wisdom for my sake
When I should grow to manhood. While a child,
Coming upon the casket where it lay
Unguarded,—what did I but toss the thing
Into a fire to make more flame therewith,
Meaning no harm? So acts man three-years old!
I grieve now at my loss by witlessness,
But guilt was none to punish. Man mature—
Each word of his I lightly held, each look
I turned from—wish that wished in vain—nay, will
That willed and yet went all to waste—'tis these
Rankle like fire. Forgiveness? rather grant
Forgetfulness! The past is past and lost.
However near I stand in his regard,
So much the nearer had I stood by steps
Offered the feet which rashly spurned their help.
That I call Hell; why further punishment?"

When I vexed you and you chid me,
And I owned my fault and turned
My cheek the way you bid me,
And confessed the blow well earned,—

My comfort all the while was
—Fault was faulty—near, not quite!
Do you wonder why the smile was?
O'erpunished wrong grew right.

But faults you ne'er suspected,
Nay, praised, no faults at all,—
Those would you had detected—
Crushed eggs whence snakes could crawl!

TWO CAMELS.

QUOTH one: "Sir, solve a scruple! No true sage
I hear of, but instructs his scholar thus:
'Wouldst thou be wise? Then mortify thyself!
Baulk of its craving every bestial sense!
Say "If I relish melons—so do swine!
Horse, ass and mule consume their provender
Nor leave a pea-pod: fasting feeds the soul."'
Thus they admonish: while thyself, I note,
Eatest thy ration with an appetite,
Nor fallest foul of whoso licks his lips
And sighs—'Well-saffroned was that barley soup!'
Can wisdom co-exist with—gorge-and-swill,
I say not,—simply sensual preference
For this or that fantastic meat and drink?
Moreover, wind blows sharper than its wont
This morning, and thou hast already donned
Thy sheepskin over-garment: sure the sage

Is busied with conceits that soar above
A petty change of season and its chance
Of causing ordinary flesh to sneeze?
I always thought, Sir" . . .

"Son," Ferishtah said,
"Truth ought to seem as never thought before.
How if I give it birth in parable?
A neighbour owns two camels, beasts of price
And promise, destined each to go, next week,
Swiftly and surely with his merchandise
From Nishapur to Sebzevar, no truce
To tramp, but travel, spite of sands and drouth,
In days so many, lest they miss the Fair.
Each falls to meditation o'er his crib
Piled high with provender before the start.
Quoth this: 'My soul is set on winning praise
From goodman lord and master,—hump to hoof,
I dedicate me to his service. How?
Grass, purslane, lupines and I know not what,
Crammed in my manger? Ha, I see—I see!
No, master, spare thy money! I shall trudge
The distance and yet cost thee not a doit
Beyond my supper on this mouldy bran.'
'Be magnified, O master, for the meal
So opportunely liberal!' quoth that.
'What use of strength in me but to surmount
Sands and simooms, and bend beneath thy bales
No knee until I reach the glad bazaar?
Thus I do justice to thy fare: no sprig
Of toothsome chervil must I leave unchewed!
Too bitterly should I reproach myself
Did I sink down in sight of Sebzevar,
Remembering how the merest mouthful more
Had heartened me to manage yet a mile!'
And so it proved: the too-abstemious brute
Midway broke down, his pack rejoiced the thieves,
His carcass fed the vultures: not so he
The wisely thankful, who, good market-drudge,
Let down his lading in the market-place,
No damage to a single pack. Which beast,
Think ye, had praise and patting and a brand
Of good-and-faithful-servant fixed on flank?
So, with thy squeamish scruple. What imports
Fasting or feasting? Do thy day's work, dare
Refuse no help thereto, since help refused
Is hindrance sought and found. Win but the race—
Who shall object 'He tossed three wine cups off,
And, just at starting, Lilith kissed his lips'?

"More soberly,—consider this, my Son
Put case I never have myself enjoyed,
Known by experience what enjoyment means,
How shall I—share enjoyment?—no, indeed!—
Supply it to my fellows,—ignorant,
As so I should be of the thing they crave,
How it affects them, works for good or ill.
Style my enjoyment self-indulgence—sin—
Why should I labour to infect my kind
With sin's occasion, bid them too enjoy,
Who else might neither catch nor give again
Joy's plague, but live in righteous misery?
Just as I cannot, till myself convinced,
Impart conviction, so, to deal forth joy
Adroitly, needs must I know joy myself.
Renounce joy for my fellows' sake? That's joy
Beyond joy; but renounced for mine, not theirs?
Why, the physician called to help the sick,
Cries 'Let me, first of all, discard my health!'
No, Son: the richness hearted in such joy
Is in the knowing what are gifts we give,
Not in a vain endeavour not to know!
Therefore, desire joy and thank God for it!
The Adversary said,—a Jew reports,—
החנם ירא איוב אלהים:
In Persian phrase, 'Does Job fear God for nought?'
Job's creatureship is not abjured, thou fool!
He nowise isolates himself and plays
The independent equal, owns no more

Than himself gave himself, so why thank God?
A proper speech were this מאלהים
'Equals we are, Job, labour for thyself,
Nor bid me help thee: bear, as best flesh may,
Pains I inflict not nor avail to cure:
Beg of me nothing thou thyself mayst win
By work, or waive with magnanimity,
Since we are peers acknowledged,—scarcely peers,
Had I implanted any want of thine
Only my power could meet and gratify.'
No: rather hear, at man's indifference—
'Wherefore did I contrive for thee that ear
Hungry for music, and direct thine eye
To where I hold a seven-stringed instrument,
Unless I meant thee to beseech me play?'"

Once I saw a chemist take a pinch of powder
—Simple dust it seemed—and half-unstop a phial:
—Out dropped harmless dew. "Mixed nothings make"—quoth he—
"Something!" So they did: a thunderclap, but louder—
Lightning-flash, but fiercer—put spectators' nerves to trial:
Sure enough, we learned what was, imagined what might be.

Had I no experience how a lip's mere tremble,
Look's half hesitation, cheek's just change of colour,
These effect a heartquake,—how should I conceive
What a heaven there may be? Let it but resemble
Earth myself have known! No bliss that's finer, fuller,
Only—bliss that lasts, they say, and fain would I believe.

CHERRIES.

"WHAT, I disturb thee at thy morning-meal:
Cherries so ripe already? Eat apace!
I recollect thy lesson yesterday.
Yet—thanks, Sir, for thy leave to interrupt" . . .

"Friend, I have finished my repast, thank God!"

"There now, thy thanks for breaking fast on fruit!—
Thanks being praise, or tantamount thereto.
Prithee consider, have not things degree,
Lofty and low? Are things not great and small,
Thence claiming praise and wonder more or less?
Shall we confuse them, with thy warrant too,
Whose doctrine otherwise begins and ends
With just this precept 'Never faith enough
In man as weakness, God as potency'?
When I would pay soul's tribute to that same,
Why not look up in wonder, bid the stars
Attest my praise of the All-mighty One?
What are man's puny members and as mean
Requirements weighed with Star-King Mushtari?
There is the marvel!"

"Not to man—that's me.
List to what happened late, in fact or dream.
A certain stranger, bound from far away,
Still the Shah's subject, found himself before
Ispahan palace-gate. As duty bade,
He enters in the courts, will, if he may,
See so much glory as befits a slave
Who only comes, of mind to testify
How great and good is shown our lord the Shah.
In he walks, round he casts his eye about,
Looks up and down, admires to heart's content,
Ascends the gallery, tries door and door,
None says his reverence nay: peeps in at each,
Wonders at all the unimagined use,
Gold here and jewels there,—so vast, that hall—
So perfect yon pavilion!—lamps above
Bidding look up from luxuries below,—
Evermore wonder topping wonder,—last—
Sudden he comes upon a cosy nook,
A nest-like little chamber, with his name,
His own, yea, his and no mistake at all,
Plain o'er the entry: what, and he descries

Just those arrangements inside,—oh, the care!—
Suited to soul and body both,—so snug
The cushion—nay, the pipe-stand furnished so!
Whereat he cries aloud,—what think'st thou, Friend?
'That these my slippers should be just my choice,
Even to the colour that I most affect,
Is nothing: ah, that lamp, the central sun,
What must it light within its minaret
I scarce dare guess the good of! Who lives there?
That let me wonder at,—no slipper-toys
Meant for the foot, forsooth, which kicks them—thus!'

"Never enough faith in omnipotence,—
Never too much, by parity, of faith
In impuissance, man's—which turns to strength
When once acknowledged weakness every way.
How? Hear the teaching of another tale.

"Two men once owed the Shah a mighty sum,
Beggars they both were: this one crossed his arms
And bowed his head,—'whereof,'—sighed he,—'each hair
Proved it a jewel, how the host's amount
Were idly strewn for payment at thy feet!'
'Lord, here they lie, my havings poor and scant!
All of the berries on my currant-bush,
What roots of garlic have escaped the mice,
And some five pippins from the seedling tree,—
Would they were half-a-dozen! anyhow,
Accept my all, poor beggar that I am!'
'Received in full of all demands!' smiled back
The apportioner of every lot of ground
From inch to acre. Littleness of love
Befits the littleness of loving thing.
What if he boasted 'Seeing I am great,
Great must my corresponding tribute be?'
Mushtari,—well, suppose him seven times seven
The sun's superior, proved so by some sage:
Am I that sage? To me his twinkle blue
Is all I know of him and thank him for,
And therefore I have put the same in verse—
'Like yon blue twinkle, twinks thine eye, my Love!'

"Neither shalt thou be troubled overmuch
Because thy offering,—littleness itself,—
Is lessened by admixture sad and strange
Of mere man's-motives,—praise with fear, and love
With looking after that same love's reward.
Alas, Friend, what was free from this alloy,—
Some smatch thereof,—in best and purest love
Proffered thy earthly father? Dust thou art,
Dust shalt be to the end. Thy father took
The dust, and kindly called the handful—gold,
Nor cared to count what sparkled here and there,
Sagely unanalytic. Thank, praise, love
(Sum up thus) for the lowest favours first,
The commonest of comforts! aught beside
Very omnipotence had overlooked
Such needs, arranging for thy little life.
Nor waste thy power of love in wonderment
At what thou wiselier lettest shine unsoiled
By breath of word. That this last cherry soothes
A roughness of my palate, that I know:
His Maker knows why Mushtari was made."

Verse-making was least of my virtues: I viewed with despair
Wealth that never yet was but might be—all that verse-making were
If the life would but lengthen to wish, let the mind be laid bare.
So I said "To do little is bad, to do nothing is worse"—And made verse.

Love-making,—how simple a matter! No depths to explore,
No heights in a life to ascend! No disheartening Before,
No affrighting Hereafter,—love now will be love evermore.
So I felt "To keep silence were folly:"—all language above, I made love.

PLOT-CULTURE.

"Ay, but, Ferishtah,"—a disciple smirked,—
"That verse of thine 'How twinks thine eye, my Love,
Blue as yon star-beam!' much arrides myself
Who haply may obtain a kiss therewith
This eve from Laila where the palms abound—
My youth, my warrant—so the palms be close!
Suppose when thou art earnest in discourse
Concerning high and holy things,—abrupt
I out with—'Laila's lip, how honey-sweet!'—
What say'st thou, were it scandalous or no?
I feel thy shoe sent flying at my mouth
For daring—prodigy of impudence—
Publish what, secret, were permissible.
Well,—one slide further in the imagined slough,—
Knee-deep therein, (respect thy reverence!)—
Suppose me well aware thy very self
Stooped prying through the palm-screen, while I dared
Solace me with caressings all the same?
Unutterable, nay—unthinkable,
Undreamable a deed of shame! Alack,
How will it fare shouldst thou impress on me
That certainly an Eye is over all
And each, to mark the minute's deed, word, thought,
As worthy of reward or punishment?
Shall I permit my sense an Eye-viewed shame,
Broad daylight perpetration,—so to speak,—
I had not dared to breathe within the Ear,
With black night's help about me? Yet I stand
A man, no monster, made of flesh not cloud:
Why made so, if my making prove offence
To Maker's eye and ear?"

"Thou wouldst not stand
Distinctly Man,"—Ferishtah made reply,
"Not the mere creature,—did no limit-line
Round thee about, apportion thee thy place
Clean-cut from out and off the illimitable,—
Minuteness severed from immensity.
All of thee for the Maker,—for thyself,
Workings inside the circle that evolve
Thine all,—the product of thy cultured plot.
So much of grain the ground's lord bids thee yield
Bring sacks to granary in Autumn! spare
Daily intelligence of this manure,
That compost, how they tend to feed the soil:
There thou art master sole and absolute
—Only, remember doomsday! Twitt'st thou me
Because I turn away my outraged nose
Shouldst thou obtrude thereon a shovelful
Of fertilizing kisses? Since thy sire
Wills and obtains thy marriage with the maid,
Enough! Be reticent, I counsel thee,
Nor venture to acquaint him, point by point,
What he procures thee. Is he so obtuse?
Keep thy instruction to thyself! My ass—
Only from him expect acknowledgment
The while he champs my gift, a thistle-bunch,
How much he loves the largess: of his love
I only tolerate so much as tells
By wrinkling nose and inarticulate grunt,
The meal, that heartens him to do my work,
Tickles his palate as I meant it should."

Not with my Soul, Love!—bid no Soul like mine
Lap thee around nor leave the poor Sense room!
Soul,—travel-worn, toil-weary,—would confine
Along with Soul, Soul's gains from glow and gloom,

Captures from soarings high and divings deep.
Spoil-laden Soul, how should such memories sleep?
Take Sense, too—let me love entire and whole—
Not with my Soul!

Eyes shall meet eyes and find no eyes between,
Lips feed on lips, no other lips to fear!
No past, no future—so thine arms but screen
The present from surprise! not there, 'tis here—
Not then, 'tis now:—back, memories that intrude!
Make, Love, the universe our solitude,
And, over all the rest, oblivion roll—
Sense quenching Soul!

A PILLAR AT SEBZEVAR.

"KNOWLEDGE deposed, then!"—groaned whom that most grieved
As foolishest of all the company.
"What, knowledge, man's distinctive attribute,
He doffs that crown to emulate an ass
Because the unknowing long-ears loves at least
Husked lupines, and belike the feeder's self
—Whose purpose in the dole what ass divines?"

"Friend," quoth Ferishtah, "all I seem to know
Is—I know nothing save that love I can
Boundlessly, endlessly. My curls were crowned
In youth with knowledge,—off, alas, crown slipped
Next moment, pushed by better knowledge still
Which nowise proved more constant: gain, to-day,
Was toppling loss to-morrow, lay at last
—Knowledge, the golden?—lacquered ignorance!
As gain—mistrust it! Not as means to gain:
Lacquer we learn by: cast in fining-pot,
We learn,—when what seemed ore assayed proves dross,—
Surelier true gold's worth, guess how purity
I' the lode were precious could one light on ore
Clarified up to test of crucible.
The prize is in the process: knowledge means
Ever-renewed assurance by defeat
That victory is somehow still to reach,
But love is victory, the prize itself:
Love—trust to! Be rewarded for the trust
In trust's mere act. In love success is sure,
Attainment—no delusion, whatsoe'er
The prize be: apprehended as a prize,
A prize it is. Thy child as surely grasps
An orange as he fails to grasp the sun
Assumed his capture. What if soon he finds
The foolish fruit unworthy grasping? Joy
In shape and colour,—that was joy as true—
Worthy in its degree of love—as grasp
Of sun were, which had singed his hand beside.
What if he said the orange held no juice
Since it was not that sun he hoped to suck?
This constitutes the curse that spoils our life
And sets man maundering of his misery,
That there's no meanest atom he obtains
Of what he counts for knowledge but he cries
'Hold here,—I have the whole thing,—know, this time,
Nor need search farther!' Whereas, strew his path
With pleasures, and he scorns them while he stoops:
'This fitly call'st thou pleasure, pick up this
And praise it, truly? I reserve my thanks
For something more substantial.' Fool not thus
In practising with life and its delights!
Enjoy the present gift, nor wait to know
The unknowable. Enough to say 'I feel
Love's sure effect, and, being loved, must love
The love its cause behind,—I can and do!'
Nor turn to try thy brain-power on the fact,
(Apart from as it strikes thee, here and now—
Its how and why, i' the future and elsewhere)
Except to—yet once more, and ever again,
Confirm thee in thy utter ignorance:
Assured that, whatsoe'er the quality

Of love's cause, save that love was caused thereby,
This—nigh upon revealment as it seemed
A minute since—defies thy longing looks,
Withdrawn into the unknowable once more.
Wholly distrust thy knowledge, then, and trust
As wholly love allied to ignorance!
There lies thy truth and safety. Love is praise,
And praise is love! Refine the same, contrive
An intellectual tribute—ignorance
Appreciating ere approbative
Of knowledge that is infinite? With us
The small, who use the knowledge of our kind
Greater than we, more wisely ignorance
Restricts its apprehension, sees and knows
No more than brain accepts in faith of sight,
Takes first what comes first, only sure so far.
By Sebzevar a certain pillar stands
So aptly that its gnomon tells the hour;
What if the townsmen said 'Before we thank
Who placed it, for his serviceable craft,
And go to dinner since its shade tells noon,
Needs must we have the craftsman's purpose clear
On half a hundred more recondite points
Than a mere summons to a vulgar meal!'
Better they say 'How opportune the help!
Be loved and praised, thou kindly-hearted sage
Whom Hudhud taught,—the gracious spirit-bird,—
How to construct the pillar, teach the time!'
So let us say—not 'Since we know, we love,'
But rather 'Since we love, we know enough.'
Perhaps the pillar by a spell controlled
Mushtari in his courses? Added grace
Surely I count it that the sage devised,
Beside celestial service, ministry
To all the land, by one sharp shade at noon
Falling as folk foresee. Once more then, Friend—
(What ever in those careless ears of thine
Withal I needs must round thee)—knowledge doubt
Even wherein it seems demonstrable!
Love,—in the claim for love, that's gratitude
For apprehended pleasure, nowise doubt!
Pay its due tribute,—sure that pleasure is,
While knowledge may be, at the most. See, now!
Eating my breakfast, I thanked God.—'For love
Shown in the cherries' flavour? Consecrate
So petty an example?' There's the fault!
We circumscribe omnipotence. Search sand
To unearth water: if first handful scooped
Yields thee a draught, what need of digging down
Full fifty fathoms deep to find a spring
Whereof the pulse might deluge half the land?
Drain the sufficient drop, and praise what checks
The drouth that glues thy tongue,—what more would help
A brimful cistern? Ask the cistern's boon
When thou wouldst solace camels: in thy case,
Relish the drop and love the loveable!"

"And what may be unloveable?"

"Why, hate!
If out of sand comes sand and nought but sand
Affect not to be quaffing at mirage,
Nor nickname pain as pleasure. That, belike,
Constitutes just the trial of thy wit
And worthiness to gain promotion,—hence,
Proves the true purpose of thine actual life.
Thy soul's environment of things perceived,
Things visible and things invisible,
Fact, fancy—all was purposed to evolve
This and this only—was thy wit of worth
To recognize the drop's use, love the same,
And loyally declare against mirage
Though all the world asseverated dust
Was good to drink? Say, 'what made moist my lip,
That I acknowledged moisture:' thou art saved!

"For why? The creature and creator stand
Rightly related so. Consider well!
Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God
Must be ignored: love gains him by first leap.
Frankly accept the creatureship: ask good
To love for: press bold to the tether's end
Allotted to this life's intelligence!
'So we offend?' Will it offend thyself
If,—impuissance praying potency,—
Thy child beseech that thou command the sun
Rise bright to-morrow—thou, he thinks supreme
In power and goodness, why shouldst thou refuse?
Afterward, when the child matures, perchance
The fault were greater if, with wit full-grown,
The stripling dared to ask for a dinar,
Than that the boy cried 'Pluck Sitara[1] down
And give her me to play with!' 'Tis for him
To have no bounds to his belief in thee:
For thee it also is to let her shine
Lustrous and lonely, so best serving him!"

Ask not one least word of praise!
Words declare your eyes are bright?
What then meant that summer day's
Silence spent in one long gaze?
Was my silence wrong or right?

Words of praise were all to seek!
Face of you and form of you,
Did they find the praise so weak
When my lips just touched your cheek—
Touch which let my soul come through?

A BEAN-STRIPE: ALSO, APPLE-EATING.

"Look, I strew beans" . . .

(Ferishtah, we premise,
Strove this way with a scholar's cavilment
Who put the peevish question: "Sir, be frank!
A good thing or a bad thing—Life is which?
Shine and shade, happiness and misery
Battle it out there: which force beats, I ask?
If I pick beans from out a bushelful—
This one, this other,—then demand of thee
What colour names each justly in the main,—
'Black' I expect, and 'White' ensues reply:
No hesitation for what speck, spot, splash
Of either colour's opposite, intrudes
To modify thy judgment. Well, for beans
Substitute days,—show, ranged in order, Life—
Then, tell me its true colour! Time is short,
Life's days compose a span,—as brief be speech!
Black I pronounce for, like the Indian Sage,—
Black—present, past and future, interspersed
With blanks, no doubt, which simple folk style Good
Because not Evil: no, indeed? Forsooth
Black's shade on White is White too! What's the worst
Of Evil but that, past, it overshades
The else-exempted present?—memory,
We call the plague! 'Nay, but our memory fades
And leaves the past unsullied!' Does it so?
Why, straight the purpose of such breathing-space,
Such respite from past ill, grows plain enough!
What follows on remembrance of the past?
Fear of the future! Life, from birth to death,
Means—either looking back on harm escaped,
Or looking forward to that harm's return
With tenfold power of harming. Black, not White,
Never the whole consummate quietude
Life should be, troubled by no fear!—nor hope—
I'll say, since lamplight dies in noontide, hope
Loses itself in certainty. Such lot
Man's might have been: I leave the consequence
To bolder critics of the Primal Cause;
Such am not I: but, man—as man I speak:
Black is the bean-throw: evil is the Life!")

"Look, I strew beans"—resumed Ferishtah—"beans
Blackish and whitish; what they figure forth

[1] In Persian means a star.

Shall be man's sum of moments, bad and good,
That make up Life,—each moment when he feels
Pleasure or pain, his poorest fact of sense,
Consciousness anyhow: there's stand the first;
Whence next advance shall be from points to line,
Singulars to a series, parts to whole,
And moments to the Life. How look they now,
Viewed in the large, those little joys and griefs
Ranged duly all a-row at last, like beans
—These which I strew? This bean was white, this—black,
Set by itself,—but see if, good and bad
Each following either in companionship,
Black have not grown less black and white less white,
Till blackish seems but dun, and whitish—grey,
And the whole line turns—well, or black to thee
Or white belike to me—no matter which:
The main result is—both are modified
According to our eye's scope, power of range
Before and after. Black dost call this bean?
What, with a whiteness in its wake, which —see—
Suffuses half its neighbour?—and, in turn,
Lowers its pearliness late absolute,
Frowned upon by the jet which follows hard—
Else wholly white my bean were. Choose a joy!
Bettered it was by sorrow gone before,
And sobered somewhat by the shadowy sense
Of sorrow which came after or might come.
Joy, sorrow,—by precedence, subsequence—
Either on each, make fusion, mix in Life
That's both and neither wholly: grey or dun?
Dun thou decidest? grey prevails, say I:
Wherefore? Because my view is wide enough,
Reaches from first to last nor winks at all:
Motion achieves it: stop short — fast we stick,—
Probably at the bean that's blackest.

"Since—
Son, trust me,—this I know and only this—
I am in motion, and all things beside
That circle round my passage through their midst,—
Motionless, these are, as regarding me:
—Which means, myself I solely recognize.
They too may recognize themselves, not me,
For aught I know or care: but plain they serve
This, if no other purpose—stuff to try
And test my power upon of raying light
And lending hue to all things as I go
Moonlike through vapour. Mark the flying orb!
Think'st thou the halo, painted still afresh
At each new cloud-fleece pierced and passaged through,
This was and is and will be evermore
Coloured in permanence? The glory swims
Girdling the glory-giver, swallowed straight
By night's abysmal gloom, unglorified
Behind as erst before the advancer: gloom?
Faced by the onward-faring, see, succeeds
From the abandoned heaven a next surprise,
And where's the gloom now?—silver-smitten straight,
One glow and variegation! So with me,
Who move and make,—myself,—the black, the white,
The good, the bad, of life's environment.
Stand still! black stays black: start again! there's white
Asserts supremacy: the motion's all
That colours me my moment: seen as joy?
I have escaped from sorrow, or that was
Or might have been: as sorrow?—thence shall be
Escape as certain: white preceded black,
Black shall give way to white as duly,—so,
Deepest in black means white most imminent.
Stand still,—have no before, no after!—life
Proves death, existence grows impossible
To man like me. 'What else is blessed sleep
But death, then?' Why, a rapture of release
From toil, — that's sleep's approach: as certainly,
The end of sleep means, toil is triumphed o'er:

These round the blank inconsciousness between
Brightness and brightness, either pushed to blaze
Just through that blank's interposition. Hence
The use of things external: man—that's I—
Practise thereon my power of casting light,
And calling substance,—when the light I cast
Breaks into colour,—by its proper name
—A truth and yet a falsity: black, white,
Names each bean taken from what lay so close
And threw such tint: pain might mean pain indeed
Seen in the passage past it,—pleasure prove
No mere delusion while I paused to look,—
Though what an idle fancy was that fear
Which overhung and hindered pleasure's hue!
While how, again, pain's shade enhanced the shine
Of pleasure, else no pleasure! Such effects
Came of such causes. Passage at an end,—
Past, present, future pains and pleasures fused
So that one glance may gather blacks and whites
Into a life-time,—like my bean-streak there,
Why, white they whirl into, not black—for me!"

"Ay, but for me? The indubitable blacks,
Immeasurable miseries, here, there
And everywhere i' the world—world outside thine
Paled off so opportunely,—body's plague,
Torment of soul,—where's found thy fellowship
With wide humanity all round about
Reeling beneath its burden? What's despair?
Behold that man, that woman, child—nay, brute!
Will any speck of white unblacken life
Splashed, splotched, dyed hell-deep now from end to end
For him or her or it—who knows? Not I!"

"Nor I, Son! 'It' shall stand for bird, beast, fish,
Reptile, and insect even: take the last!
There's the palm-aphis, minute miracle
As wondrous every whit as thou or I:
Well, and his world's the palm-frond, there he's born,
Lives, breeds and dies in that circumference,
An inch of green for cradle, pasture-ground,
Purlieu and grave: the palm's use, ask of him!
'To furnish these,' replies his wit: ask thine—
Who see the heaven above, the earth below,
Creation everywhere,—these, each and all
Claim certain recognition from the tree
For special service rendered branch and bole,
Top-tuft and tap-root:—for thyself, thus seen,
Palms furnish dates to eat, and leaves to shade,
—Maybe, thatch huts with,—have another use
Than strikes the aphis. So with me, my Son!
I know my own appointed patch i' the world,
What pleasures me or pains there: all outside—
How he, she, it, and even thou, Son, live,
Are pleased or pained, is past conjecture, once
I pry beneath the semblance,—all that's fit,
To practise with,—reach where the fact may lie
Fathom-deep lower. There's the first and last
Of my philosophy. Blacks blur thy white?
Not mine! The aphis feeds, nor finds his leaf
Untenable because a lance-thrust, nay,
Lightning strikes sere a moss-patch close beside,
Where certain other aphids live and love.
Restriction to his single inch of white,
That's law for him, the aphis: but for me,
The man, the larger-souled, beside my stretch
Of blacks and whites, I see a world of woe
All round about me: one such burst of black
Intolerable o'er the life I count
White in the main, and, yea—white's faintest trace
Were clean abolished once and evermore.
Thus fare my fellows, swallowed up in gloom
So far as I discern: how far is that?
God's care be God's! 'Tis mine—to boast no joy
Unsobered by such sorrows of my kind
As sully with their shade my life that shines."

"Reflected possibilities of pain,
Forsooth, just chasten pleasure! Pain itself,—
Fact and not fancy, does not this affect
The general colour?"

"Here and there a touch
Taught me, betimes, the artifice of things—
That all about, external to myself,
Was meant to be suspected,—not revealed
Demonstrably a cheat,—but half seen through,
Lest white should rule unchecked along the line:
Therefore white may not triumph. All the same,
Of absolute and irretrievable
And all-subduing black,—black's soul of black
Beyond white's power to disintensify,—
Of that I saw no sample: such may wreck
My life and ruin my philosophy
To-morrow, doubtless: hence the constant shade
Cast on life's shine,—the tremor that intrudes
When firmest seems my faith in white. Dost ask
'Who is Ferishtah, hitherto exempt
From black experience? Why, if God be just,
Were sundry fellow-mortals singled out
To undergo experience for his sake,
Just that the gift of pain, bestowed on them,
In him might temper to the due degree
Joy's else-excessive largess?' Why, indeed!
Back are we brought thus to the starting-point—
Man's impotency, God's omnipotence,
These stop my answer. Aphis that I am,
How leave my inch-allotment, pass at will
Into my fellow's liberty of range,
Enter into his sense of black and white,
As either, seen by me from outside, seems
Predominatingly the colour? Life,
Lived by my fellow, shall I pass into
And myself live there? No—no more than pass
From Persia, where in sun since birth I bask
Daily, to some ungracious land afar,
Told of by travellers, where the might of snow
Smothers up day, and fluids lose themselves
Frozen to marble. How I bear the sun,
Beat though he may unduly, that I know:
How blood once curdled ever creeps again,
Baffles conjecture: yet since people live
Somehow, resist a clime would conquer me,
Somehow provided for their sake must dawn
Compensative resource. 'No sun, no grapes,—
Then, no subsistence!'—were it wisely said?
Or this well-reasoned—'Do I dare feel warmth
And please my palate here with Persia's vine,
Though, over-mounts,—to trust the traveller,—
Snow, feather thick, is falling while I feast?
What if the cruel winter force his way
Here also?' Son, the wise reply were this:
When cold from over-mounts spikes through and through
Blood, bone and marrow of Ferishtah,—then,
Time to look out for shelter—time, at least,
To wring the hands and cry 'No shelter serves!'
Shelter, of some sort, no experienced chill
Warrants that I despair to find."

"No less,
Doctors have differed here; thou say'st thy say;
Another man's experience masters thine,
Flat controverted by the sourly-Sage,
The Indian witness who, with faculty
Fine as Ferishtah's, found no white at all
Chequer the world's predominating black,
No good oust evil from supremacy,
So that Life's best was that it led to death.
How of his testimony?"

"Son, suppose
My camel told me: 'Threescore days and ten
I traversed hill and dale, yet never found
Food to stop hunger, drink to stay my drouth;
Yet, here I stand alive, which take in proof
That to survive was found impossible!'
'Nay, rather take thou, non-surviving beast'
(Reply were prompt), 'on flank this thwack of staff
Nowise affecting flesh that's dead and dry!
Thou wincest? Take correction twice, amend

Next time thy nomenclature! Call white—
white!'
The sourly-Sage, for whom life's best was
death,
Lived out his seventy years, looked hale,
laughed loud,
Liked—above all—his dinner,—lied, in short."

"Lied is a rough phrase: say he fell from
truth
In climbing towards it!—sure less faulty so
Than had he sat him down and stayed content
With thy safe orthodoxy, 'White, all white,
White everywhere for certain I should see
Did I but understand how white is black,
As clearer sense than mine would.' Clearer
sense,—
Whose may that be? Mere human eyes I
boast,
And such distinguish colours in the main,
However any tongue, that's human too,
Please to report the matter. Dost thou blame
A soul that strives but to see plain, speak true,
Truth at all hazards? Oh, this false for real,
This emptiness which feigns solidity,—
Ever some grey that's white, and dun that's
black,—
When shall we rest upon the thing itself
Not on its semblance?—Soul—too weak,
forsooth,
To cope with fact—wants fiction everywhere!
Mine tires of falsehood: truth at any cost!"

"Take one and try conclusions—this, sup-
pose!
God is all-good, all-wise, all-powerful: truth?
Take it and rest there. What is man? Not
God:
None of these absolutes therefore,—yet him-
self,
A creature with a creature's qualities.
Make them agree, these two conceptions! Each
Abolishes the other. Is man weak,
Foolish and bad? He must be Ahriman,
Co-equal with an Ormuzd, Bad with Good,
Or else a thing made at the Prime Sole Will,
Doing a maker's pleasure—with results
Which—call, the wide world over, 'what
must be'—
But, from man's point of view, and only point
Possible to his powers, call—evidence
Of goodness, wisdom, strength? we mock
ourselves
In all that's best of us,—man's blind but sure
Craving for these in very deed not word,
Reality and not illusion. Well,—
Since these nowhere exist—nor there where
cause
Must have effect, nor here where craving
means
Craving unfollowed by fit consequence
And full supply, aye sought for, never found—
These—what are they but man's own rule of
right?
A scheme of goodness recognized by man,
Although by man unrealizable,—
Not God's with whom to will were to perform:
Nowise performed here, therefore never willed.
What follows but that God, who could the best,
Has willed the worst,—while man, with power
to match
Will with performance, were deservedly
Hailed the supreme—provided . . . here's
the touch
That breaks the bubble . . . this concept of
man's
Were man's own work, his birth of heart and
brain,
His native grace, no alien gift at all.
The bubble breaks here. Will of man create?
No more than this my hand which strewed
the beans
Produced them also from its finger-tips.
Back goes creation to its source, source prime
And ultimate, the single and the sole."

"How reconcile discordancy,—unite
Notion and notion—God that only can
Yet does not,—man that would indeed
But just as surely cannot,—both in one?
What help occurs to thy intelligence?"

"Ah, the beans,—or,—example better yet,—
A carpet-web I saw once leave the loom
And lie at gorgeous length in Ispahan!

The weaver plied his work with lengths of silk
Dyed each to match some jewel as it might,
And wove them, this by that. 'How comes it, friend,'—
(Quoth I)—'that while, apart, this fiery hue,
That watery dimness, either shocks the eye,
So blinding bright, or else offends again
By dulness,—yet the two, set each by each,
Somehow produce a colour born of both,
A medium profitable to the sight?'
'Such medium is the end whereat I aim,'—
Answered my craftsman: 'there's no single tinct
Would satisfy the eye's desire to taste
The secret of the diamond: join extremes,
Results a serviceable medium-ghost,
The diamond's simulation. Even so
I needs must blend the quality of man
With quality of God, and so assist
Mere human sight to understand my Life,
What is, what should be,—understand thereby
Wherefore I hate the first and love the last,—
Understand why things so present themselves
To me, placed here to prove I understand.
Thus, from beginning runs the chain to end,
And binds me plain enough. By consequence,
I bade thee tolerate,—not kick and cuff
The man who held that natures did in fact
Blend so, since so thyself must have them blend
In fancy, if it take a flight so far."

"A power, confessed past knowledge, nay, past thought,
—Thus thought thus known!"

"To know of, think about—
Is all man's sum of faculty effects
When exercised on earth's least atom, Son!
What was, what is, what may such atom be?
No answer! Still, what seems it to man's sense?
An atom with some certain properties
Known about, thought of as occasion needs,
—Man's—but occasions of the universe?
Unthinkable, unknowable to man.
Yet, since to think and know fire through and through
Exceeds man, is the warmth of fire unknown,
Its uses—are they so unthinkable?
Pass from such obvious power to powers unseen,
Undreamed of save in their sure consequence:
Take that, we spoke of late, which draws to ground
The staff my hand lets fall: it draws, at least—
Thus much man thinks and knows, if nothing more."

"Ay, but man puts no mind into such power!
He neither thanks it, when an apple drops,
Nor prays it spare his pate while underneath.
Does he thank Summer though it plumped the rind?
Why thank the other force — whate'er its name—
Which gave him teeth to bite and tongue to taste
And throat to let the pulp pass? Force and force,
No end of forces! Have they mind like man?"

"Suppose thou visit our lord Shalim-Shah,
Bringing thy tribute as appointed. 'Here
Come I to pay my due!' Whereat one slave
Obsequious spreads a carpet for thy foot,
His fellow offers sweetmeats, while a third
Prepares a pipe: what thanks or praise have they?
Such as befit prompt service. Gratitude
Goes past them to the Shah whose gracious nod
Set all the sweet civility at work;
But for his ordinance, I much suspect,
My scholar had been left to cool his heels
Uncarpeted, or warm them—likelier still—
With bastinado for intrusion. Slaves
Needs must obey their master: 'force and force,
No end of forces,' act as bids some force

Supreme o'er all and each: where find that one?
How recognize him? Simply as thou didst
The Shah—by reasoning 'Since I feel a debt,
Behoves me pay the same to one aware
I have my duty, he his privilege.'
Didst thou expect the slave who charged thy pipe
Would serve as well to take thy tribute-bag
And save thee further trouble?"

"Be it so!
The sense within me that I owe a debt
Assures me—somewhere must be somebody
Ready to take his due. All comes to this—
Where due is, there acceptance follows: find
Him who accepts the due! and why look far?
Behold thy kindred compass thee about!
Ere thou wast born and after thou shalt die,
Heroic man stands forth as Shahan-Shah.
Rustem and Gew, Gudarz and all the rest,
How come they short of lordship that's to seek
Dead worthies! but men live undoubtedly
Gifted as Sindokht, sage Sulayman's match,
Valiant like Kawah: ay, and while earth lasts
Such heroes shall abound there—all for thee
Who profitest by all the present, past,
And future operation of thy race.
Why, then, o'erburdened with a debt of thanks,
Look wistful for some hand from out the clouds
To take it, when, all round, a multitude
Would ease thee in a trice?"

"Such tendered thanks
Would tumble back to who craved riddance, Son!
—Who but my sorry self? See! stars are out—
Stars which, unconscious of thy gaze beneath,
Go glorying, and glorify thee too
—Those Seven Thrones, Zurah's beauty, weird Parwin!
Whether shall love and praise to stars be paid
Or—say—some Mubid who, for good to thee
Blind at thy birth, by magic all his own
Opened thine eyes, and gave the sightless sight,
Let the stars' glory enter? Say his charm
Worked while thyself lay sleeping: as he went
Thou wakedst: 'What a novel sense have I!
Whom shall I love and praise?' 'The stars, each orb
Thou standest rapt beneath,' proposes one:
'Do not they live their life, and please themselves,
And so please thee? What more is requisite?'
Make thou this answer: 'If indeed no mage
Opened my eyes and worked a miracle,
Then let the stars thank me who apprehend
That such an one is white, such other blue!
But for my apprehension both were blank.
Cannot I close my eyes and bid my brain
Make whites and blues, conceive without stars' help,
New qualities of colour? were my sight
Lost or misleading, would yon red—I judge
A ruby's benefaction—stand for aught
But green from vulgar glass? Myself appraise
Lustre and lustre; should I overlook
Fomalhaut and declare some fen-fire king,
Who shall correct me, lend me eyes he trusts
No more than I trust mine? My mage for me!
I never saw him: if he never was,
I am the arbitrator!' No, my Son!
Let us sink down to thy similitude:
I eat my apple, relish what is ripe—
The sunny side, admire its rarity
Since half the tribe is wrinkled, and the rest
Hide commonly a maggot in the core,—
And down Zerdusht goes with due smack of lips:
But—thank an apple? He who made my mouth
To masticate, my palate to approve,
My maw to further the concoction—Him
I thank,—but for whose work, the orchard's wealth

Might prove so many gall-nuts—stocks or stones
For aught that I should think, or know, or care."

"Why from the world," Ferishtah smiled, "should thanks
Go to this work of mine? If worthy praise,
Praised let it be and welcome: as verse ranks,
So rate my verse: if good therein outweighs
Aught faulty judged, judge justly! Justice says:
Be just to fact, or blaming or approving:
But—generous? No, nor loving!

"Loving! what claim to love has work of mine?
Concede my life were emptied of its gains
To furnish forth and fill work's strict confine,
Who works so for the world's sake—he complains
With cause when hate, not love, rewards his pains.
I looked beyond the world for truth and beauty:
Sought, found and did my duty."

EPILOGUE.

Oh, Love—no, Love! All the noise below, Love,
Groanings all and moanings—none of Life I lose!
All of Life's a cry just of weariness and woe, Love—
"Hear at least, thou happy one!" How can I, Love, but choose?

Only, when I do hear, sudden circle round me
—Much as when the moon's might frees a space from cloud—
Iridescent splendours: gloom—would else confound me—
Barriered off and banished far—bright-edged the blackest shroud!

Thronging through the cloud-rift, whose are they, the faces
Faint revealed yet sure divined, the famous ones of old?
"What"—they smile—"our names, our deeds so soon erases
Time upon his tablet where Life's glory lies enrolled?

"Was it for mere fool's-play, make-believe and mumming,
So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?
Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming:
Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind!

"How of the field's fortune? That concerned our Leader!
Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left and right:
Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,
Lay the blame or lit the praise: no care for cowards: fight!"

Then the cloud-rift broadens, spanning earth that's under,
Wide our world displays its worth, man's strife and strife's success:
All the good and beauty, wonder crowning wonder,
Till my heart and soul applaud perfection, nothing less.

Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror
Sudden turns the blood to ice: a chill wind disencharms
All the late enchantment! What if all be error—
If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms?

Palazzo Giustinian-Recanati,
Venice: *December* 1, 1883.

PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY:

TO WIT:

BERNARD DE MANDEVILLE, DANIEL BARTOLI, CHRISTOPHER SMART, GEORGE BUBB DODINGTON, FRANCIS FURINI, GERARD DE LAIRESSE, AND CHARLES AVISON.

INTRODUCED BY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN APOLLO AND THE FATES;

CONCLUDED BY

ANOTHER BETWEEN JOHN FUST AND HIS FRIENDS.

1887.

IN MEMORIAM J. MILSAND, OBIIT IV. SEPT. MDCCCLXXXVI.

Absens absentem auditque videtque.

APOLLO AND THE FATES.

A PROLOGUE.

(Hymn. in Mercurium, v. 559. Eumenides, vv. 693-4, 697-8. Alcestis, vv. 12, 33.)

APOLLO. [*From above.*

FLAME at my footfall, Parnassus! Apollo,
Breaking a-blaze on thy topmost peak,
Burns thence, down to the depths—dread hollow—
Haunt of the Dire Ones. Haste! They wreak
Wrath on Admetus whose respite I seek.

THE FATES. [*Below. Darkness.*

Dragonwise couched in the womb of our Mother,
Coiled at thy nourishing heart's core, Night!
Dominant Dreads, we, one by the other,
Deal to each mortal his dole of light
On earth—the upper, the glad, the bright.

CLOTHO.

Even so: thus from my loaded spindle
Plucking a pinch of the fleece, lo, "Birth"
Brays from my bronze lip: life I kindle:
Look, 'tis a man! go, measure on earth
The minute thy portion, whatever its worth!

LACHESIS.

Woe-purfled, weal-prankt,—if it speed, if it linger,—
Life's substance and show are determined by me,
Who, meting out, mixing with sure thumb and finger,
Lead life the due length: is all smoothness and glee,
All tangle and grief? Take the lot, my decree!

ATROPOS.

—Which I make an end of: the smooth as the tangled
My shears cut asunder: each snap shrieks "One more
Mortal makes sport for us Moirai who dangled
The puppet grotesquely till earth's solid floor
Proved film he fell through, lost in Nought as before."

CLOTHO.

I spin thee a thread. Live, Admetus!
Produce him!

LACHESIS.

Go, — brave, wise, good, happy! Now
chequer the thread!
He is slaved for, yet loved by a god. I
unloose him
A goddess-sent plague. He has conquered,
is wed,
Men crown him, he stands at the height,—

ATROPOS.

He is . . .

APOLLO. [*Entering: Light.*
"Dead?"

Nay, swart spinsters! So I surprise you
Making and marring the fortunes of Man?
Huddling—no marvel, your enemy eyes you—
Head by head bat-like, blots under the ban
Of daylight earth's blessing since time began!

THE FATES.

Back to thy blest earth, prying Apollo!
Shaft upon shaft transpierce with thy
beams
Earth to the centre,—spare but this hollow
Hewn out of Night's heart, where our
mystery seems
Mewed from day's malice: wake earth from
her dreams!

APOLLO.

Crones, 'tis your dusk selves I startle from
slumber:
Day's god deposes you—queens Night-
crowned!
—Plying your trade in a world ye encumber,
Fashioning Man's web of life — spun,
wound,
Left the length ye allot till a clip strews the
ground!

Behold I bid truce to your doleful amuse-
ment—
Annulled by a sunbeam!

THE FATES.

Boy, are not we peers?

APOLLO.

You with the spindle grant birth; whose
inducement
But yours—with the niggardly digits—en-
dears
To mankind chance and change, good and
evil? Your shears . . .

ATROPOS.

Ay, mine end the conflict: so much is no fable.
We spin, draw to length, cut asunder:
what then?
So it was, and so is, and so shall be: art able
To alter life's law for ephemeral men?

APOLLO.

Nor able nor willing. To threescore and ten

Extend but the years of Admetus! Disaster
O'ertook me, and, banished by Zeus, I
became
A servant to one who forbore me though master:
True lovers were we. Discontinue your
game,
Let him live whom I loved, then hate on, all
the same!

THE FATES.

And what if we granted—law-flouter, use-
trampler—
His life at the suit of an upstart? Judge,
thou—
Of joy were it fuller, of span because ampler?
For love's sake, not hate's, end Admetus
—ay, now—
Not a gray hair on head, nor a wrinkle on brow!

For, boy, 'tis illusion: from thee comes a
glimmer
Transforming to beauty life blank at the best.
Withdraw—and how looks life at worst, when
to shimmer
Succeeds the sure shade, and Man's lot
frowns—confessed
Mere blackness chance-brightened? Whereof
shall attest

The truth this same mortal, the darling thou stylest,
Whom love would advantage,—eke out, day by day,
A life which 'tis solely thyself reconcilest
Thy friend to endure,—life with hope: take away
Hope's gleam from Admetus, he spurns it. For, say—

What's infancy? Ignorance, idleness, mischief:
Youth ripens to arrogance, foolishness, greed:
Age—impotence, churlishness, rancour: call *this* chief
Of boons for thy loved one? Much rather bid speed
Our function, let live whom thou hatest indeed!

Persuade thee, bright boy-thing! Our eld be instructive!

APOLLO.

And certes youth owns the experience of age.
Ye hold then, grave seniors, my beams are productive
—They solely—of good that's mere semblance, engage
Man's eye—gilding evil, Man's true heritage?

THE FATES.

So, even so! From without,—at due distance
If viewed,—set a-sparkle, reflecting thy rays,—
Life mimics the sun: but withdraw such assistance,
The counterfeit goes, the reality stays—
An ice-ball disguised as a fire-orb.

APOLLO.

What craze
Possesses the fool then whose fancy conceits him
As happy?

THE FATES.

Man happy?

APOLLO.

If otherwise—solve
This doubt which besets me! What friend ever greets him
Except with "Live long as the seasons revolve,"
Not "Death to thee straightway"? Your doctrines absolve

Such hailing from hatred: yet Man should know best.
He talks it, and glibly, as life were a load
Man fain would be rid off: when put to the test,
He whines "Let it lie, leave me trudging the road
That is rugged so far, but methinks . . ."

THE FATES.

Ay, 'tis owed
To that glamour of thine, he bethinks him "Once past
The stony, some patch, nay, a smoothness of sward
Awaits my tired foot: life turns easy at last"—
Thy largess so lures him, he looks for reward
Of the labour and sorrow.

APOLLO.

It seems, then—debarred
Of illusion—(I needs must acknowledge the plea)
Man desponds and despairs. Yet,—still further to draw
Due profit from counsel,—suppose there should be
Some power in himself, some compensative law
By virtue of which, independently . . .

THE FATES.

Faugh!
Strength hid in the weakling!
What bowl-shape hast there,
Thus laughingly proffered? A gift to our shrine?
Thanks—worsted in argument! Not so? Declare
Its purpose!

APOLLO.

I proffer earth's product, not mine.
Taste, try, and approve Man's invention of—
WINE!

THE FATES.

We feeding suck honeycombs.

APOLLO.

Sustenance meagre!
Such fare breeds the fumes that show all things amiss.
Quaff wine,—how the spirits rise nimble and eager,
Unscale the dim eyes! To Man's cup grant one kiss
Of your lip, then allow—no enchantment like this!

CLOTHO.

Unhook wings, unhood brows! Dost hearken?

LACHESIS.

I listen:
I see—smell the food these fond mortals prefer
To our feast, the bee's bounty!

ATROPOS.

The thing leaps! But—glisten
Its best, I withstand it—unless all concur
In adventure so novel.

APOLLO.

Ye drink?

THE FATES.

We demur.

APOLLO.

Sweet Trine, be indulgent nor scout the contrivance
Of Man—Bacchus-prompted! The juice, I uphold,
Illuminates gloom without sunny connivance,
Turns fear into hope and makes cowardice bold,—
Touching all that is leadlike in life turns it gold!

THE FATES.

Faith foolish as false!

APOLLO.

But essay it, soft sisters!
Then mock as ye may. Lift the chalice to lip!
Good: thou next—and thou! Seems the web, to you twisters
Of life's yarn, so worthless?

CLOTHO.

Who guessed that one sip
Would impart such a lightness of limb?

LACHESIS.

I could skip
In a trice from the pied to the plain in my woof!
What parts each from either? A hair's breadth, no inch.
Once learn the right method of stepping aloof,
Though on black next foot falls, firm I fix it, nor flinch,
—Such my trust white succeeds!

ATROPOS.

One could live—at a pinch!

APOLLO.

What beldames? Earth's yield, by Man's skill, can effect
Such a cure of sick sense that ye spy the relation
Of evil to good? But drink deeper, correct
Blear sight more convincingly still! Take your station
Beside me, drain dregs! Now for edification!

Whose gift have ye gulped? Thank not me but my brother,
Blithe Bacchus, our youngest of godships. 'Twas he
Found all boons to all men, by one god or other
Already conceded, so judged there must be
New guerdon to grace the new advent, you see!

Else how would a claim to Man's homage arise?
The plan lay arranged of his mixed woe and weal,

So disposed—such Zeus' will—with design to make wise
The witless—that false things were mingled with real,
Good with bad: such the lot whereto law set the seal.

Now, human of instinct—since Semele's son,
Yet minded divinely—since fathered by Zeus,
With nought Bacchus tampered, undid not things done,
Owned wisdom anterior, would spare wont and use,
Yet change—without shock to old rule—introduce.

Regard how your cavern from crag-tip to base
Frowns sheer, height and depth adamantine, one death!
I rouse with a beam the whole rampart, displace
No splinter—yet see how my flambeau, beneath
And above, bids this gem wink, that crystal unsheath!

Withdraw beam—disclosure once more Night forbids you
Of spangle and sparkle—Day's chance-gift, surmised
Rock's permanent birthright: my potency rids you
No longer of darkness, yet light—recognized—
Proves darkness a mask: day lives on though disguised.

If Bacchus by wine's aid avail so to fluster
Your sense, that life's fact grows from adverse and thwart
To helpful and kindly by means of a cluster—
Mere hand-squeeze, earth's nature sublimed by Man's art—
Shall Bacchus claim thanks wherein Zeus has no part?

Zeus — wisdom anterior? No, maids, be admonished!
If morn's touch at base worked such wonders, much more
Had noontide in absolute glory astonished
Your den, filled a-top to o'erflowing. I pour
No such mad confusion. 'Tis Man's to explore

Up and down, inch by inch, with the taper his reason:
No torch, it suffices — held deftly and straight.
Eyes, purblind at first, feel their way in due season,
Accept good with bad, till unseemly debate
Turns concord—despair, acquiescence in fate.

Who works this but Zeus? Are not instinct and impulse,
Not concept and incept his work through Man's soul
On Man's sense? Just as wine ere it reach brain must brim pulse,
Zeus' flash stings the mind that speeds body to goal,
Bids pause at no part but press on, reach the whole.

For petty and poor is the part ye envisage
When—(quaff away, cummers!)—ye view, last and first,
As evil Man's earthly existence. Come! *Is* age,
Is infancy—manhood—so uninterspersed
With good—some faint sprinkle?

CLOTHO.

I'd speak if I durst.

APOLLO.

Draughts dregward loose tongue-tie.

LACHESIS.

I'd see, did no web
Set eyes somehow winking.

APOLLO.

Drains-deep lies their purge
—True collyrium!

ATROPOS.

Words, surging at high-tide, soon ebb
From starved ears.

APOLLO.

Drink but down to the source, they resurge.
Join hands! Yours and yours too! A dance or a dirge?

CHORUS.

Quashed be our quarrel! Sourly and smilingly,
Bare and gowned, bleached limbs and browned,
Drive we a dance, three and one, reconcilingly,
Thanks to the cup where dissension is drowned,
Defeat proves triumphant and slavery crowned.

Infancy? What if the rose-streak of morning
Pale and depart in a passion of tears?
Once to have hoped is no matter for scorning!
Love once—e'en love's disappointment endears!
A minute's success pays the failure of years.

Manhood — the actual? Nay, praise the potential!
(Bound upon bound, foot it around!)
What *is?* No, what *may* be—sing! that's Man's essential!
(Ramp, tramp, stamp and compound
Fancy with fact—the lost secret is found!)

Age? Why, fear ends there: the contest concluded,
Man *did* live his life, *did* escape from the fray:
Not scratchless but unscathed, he somehow eluded
Each blow fortune dealt him, and conquers to-day:
To-morrow—new chance and fresh strength, —might we say?

Laud then Man's life—no defeat but a triumph!
[*Explosion from the earth's centre.*

CLOTHO.

Ha, loose hands!

LACHESIS.

I reel in a swound.

ATROPOS.

Horror yawns under me, while from on high —humph!
Lightnings astound, thunders resound,
Vault-roof reverberates, groans the ground!
[*Silence.*

APOLLO.

I acknowledge.

THE FATES.

Hence, trickster! Straight sobered are we!
The portent assures 'twas our tongue spoke the truth,
Not thine. While the vapour encompassed us three
We conceived and bore knowledge — a bantling uncouth,
Old brains shudder back from: so—take it, rash youth!

Lick the lump into shape till a cry comes!

APOLLO.

I hear.

THE FATES.

Dumb music, dead eloquence! Say it, or sing!
What was quickened in us and thee also?

APOLLO.

I fear.

THE FATES.

Half female, half male—go, ambiguous thing!
While we speak—perchance sputter—pick up what we fling!

Known yet ignored, nor divined nor unguessed,
Such is Man's law of life. Do we strive to declare

What is ill, what is good in our spinning? Worst, best,
Change hues of a sudden: now here and now there
Flits the sign which decides: all about yet nowhere.

'Tis willed so,—that Man's life be lived, first to last,
Up and down, through and through,—not in portions, forsooth,
To pick and to choose from. Our shuttles fly fast,
Weave living, not life sole and whole: as age—youth,
So death completes living, shows life in its truth.

Man learningly lives: till death helps him—no lore!
It is doom and must be. Dost submit?

APOLLO.

I assent—
Concede but Admetus! So much if no more
Of my prayer grant as peace-pledge! Be gracious though, blent,
Good and ill, love and hate streak your life-gift!

THE FATES.

Content!

Such boon we accord in due measure. Life's term
We lengthen should any be moved for love's sake
To forego life's fulfilment, renounce in the germ
Fruit mature—bliss or woe—either infinite. Take
Or leave thy friend's lot: on his head be the stake!

APOLLO.

On mine, griesly gammers! Admetus, I know thee!
Thou prizest the right these unwittingly give
Thy subjects to rush, pay obedience they owe thee!
Importunate one with another they strive
For the glory to die that their king may survive.

Friends rush: and who first in all Pheræ appears
But thy father to serve as thy substitute?

CLOTHO.

Bah!

APOLLO.

Ye wince? Then his mother, well-stricken in years,
Advances her claim—or his wife—

LACHESIS.

Tra-la-la!

APOLLO.

But he spurns the exchange, rather dies!

ATROPOS.

Ha, ha, ha!

[*Apollo ascends. Darkness.*

WITH BERNARD DE MANDEVILLE.

[For an account of this celebrated writer see "Dictionary of National Biography," vol. xxxvi. His famous paradox, "private vices public benefits," excited the utmost fury; and his best-known book, "The Fable of the Bees," was ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. It contains passages of great eloquence and unrivalled sarcasm, and is well worth reading.]

I.

Ay, this same midnight, by this chair of mine,
Come and review thy counsels: art thou still
Staunch to their teaching?—not as fools opine
Its purport might be, but as subtler skill
Could, through turbidity, the loaded line
Of logic casting, sound deep, deeper, till
It touched a quietude and reached a shrine
And recognized harmoniously combine
Evil with good, and hailed truth's triumph—thine,
Sage dead long since, Bernard de Mandeville!

II.

Only, 'tis no fresh knowledge that I crave,
Fuller truth yet, new gainings from the grave;
Here we alive must needs deal fairly, turn
To what account Man may Man's portion, learn
Man's proper play with truth in part, before
Entrusted with the whole. I ask no more
Than smiling witness that I do my best
With doubtful doctrine: afterward the rest!
So, silent face me while I think and speak!
A full disclosure? Such would outrage law.
Law deals the same with soul and body: seek
Full truth my soul may, when some babe, I saw
A new-born weakling, starts up strong—not weak—
Man every whit, absolved from earning awe,
Pride, rapture, if the soul attains to wreak
Its will on flesh, at last can thrust, lift, draw,
As mind bids muscle—mind which long has striven,
Painfully urging body's impotence
To effort whereby—once law's barrier riven,
Life's rule abolished—body might dispense
With infancy's probation, straight be given
—Not by foiled darings, fond attempts back-driven,
Fine faults of growth, brave sins which saint when shriven—
To stand full-statured in magnificence.

III.

No: as with body so deals law with soul
That's stung to strength through weakness, strives for good
Through evil,—earth its race-ground, heaven its goal,
Presumably: so far I understood
Thy teaching long ago. But what means this
—Objected by a mouth which yesterday
Was magisterial in antithesis
To half the truths we hold, or trust we may,
Though tremblingly the while? "No sign"
—groaned he—
"No stirring of God's finger to denote
He wills that right should have supremacy
On earth, not wrong! How helpful could we quote
But one poor instance when he interposed
Promptly and surely and beyond mistake
Between oppression and its victim, closed
Accounts with sin for once, and bade us wake
From our long dream that justice bears no sword,
Or else forgets whereto its sharpness serves!
So might we safely mock at what unnerves
Faith now, be spared the sapping fear's increase
That haply evil's strife with good shall cease
Never on earth. Nay, after earth, comes peace
Born out of life-long battle? Man's lip curves
With scorn: there, also, what if justice swerves
From dealing doom, sets free by no swift stroke
Right fettered here by wrong, but leaves life's yoke—
Death should loose man from—fresh laid, past release?"

IV.

Bernard de Mandeville, confute for me
This parlous friend who captured or set free
Thunderbolts at his pleasure, yet would draw
Back, panic-stricken by some puny straw
Thy gold-rimmed amber-headed cane had whisked
Out of his pathway if the object risked
Encounter, 'scaped thy kick from buckled shoe!
As when folk heard thee in old days pooh-pooh
Addison's tye-wig preachment, grant this friend—
(Whose groan I hear, with guffaw at the end
Disposing of mock-melancholy)—grant
His bilious mood one potion, ministrant
Of homely wisdom, healthy wit! For, hear!
"With power and will, let preference appear
By intervention ever and aye, help good
When evil's mastery is understood
In some plain outrage, and triumphant wrong
Tramples weak right to nothingness: nay, long
Ere such sad consummation brings despair
To right's adherents, ah, what help it were

If wrong lay strangled in the birth—each head
Of the hatched monster promptly crushed, instead
Of spared to gather venom! We require
No great experience that the inch-long worm,
Free of our heel, would grow to vomit fire,
And one day plague the world in dragon form.
So should wrong merely peep abroad to meet
Wrong's due quietus, leave our world's way safe
For honest walking."

v.

Sage, once more repeat
Instruction! 'Tis a sore to soothe not chafe.
Ah, Fabulist, what luck, could I contrive
To coax from thee another "Grumbling Hive"!
My friend himself wrote fables short and sweet:
Ask him—"Suppose the Gardener of Man's ground
Plants for a purpose, side by side with good,
Evil—(and that he does so—look around!
What does the field show?)—were it understood
That purposely the noxious plant was found
Vexing the virtuous, poison close to food,
If, at first stealing-forth of life in stalk
And leaflet-promise, quick his spud should baulk
Evil from budding foliage, bearing fruit?
Such timely treatment of the offending root
Might strike the simple as wise husbandry,
But swift sure extirpation scarce would suit
Shrewder observers. Seed once sown thrives: why
Frustrate its product, miss the quality
Which sower binds himself to count upon?
Had seed fulfilled the destined purpose, gone
Unhindered up to harvest—what know I
But proof were gained that every growth of good
Sprang consequent on evil's neighbourhood?"
So said your shrewdness: true—so did not say
That other sort of theorists who held
Mere unintelligence prepared the way
For either seed's upsprouting: you repelled
Their notion that both kinds could sow themselves.
True! but admit 'tis understanding delves
And drops each germ, what else but folly thwarts
The doer's settled purpose? Let the sage
Concede a use to evil, though there starts
Full many a burgeon thence, to disengage
With thumb and finger lest it spoil the yield
Too much of good's main tribute! But our main
Tough-tendoned mandrake-monster—purge the field
Of him for once and all? It follows plain
Who set him there to grow beholds repealed
His primal law: his ordinance proves vain:
And what beseems a king who cannot reign,
But to drop sceptre valid arm should wield?

vi.

"Still there's a parable"—retorts my friend—
"Shows agriculture with a difference!
What of the crop and weeds which solely blend
Because, once planted, none may pluck them thence?
The Gardener contrived thus? Vain pretence!
An enemy it was who unawares
Ruined the wheat by interspersing tares.
Where's our desiderated forethought? Where's
Knowledge, where power and will in evidence
'Tis Man's-play merely! Craft foils rectitude,
Malignity defeats beneficence.
And grant, at very last of all, the feud
'Twixt good and evil ends, strange thoughts intrude
Though good be garnered safely and good's foe
Bundled for burning. Thoughts steal: 'even so—
Why grant tares leave to thus o'ertop, o'ertower
Their field-mate, boast the stalk and flaunt the flower,
Triumph one sunny minute? Knowledge, power

And will thus worked? Man's fancy makes
the fault!
Man, with the narrow mind, must cram inside
His finite God's infinitude,—earth's vault
He bids comprise the heavenly far and wide,
Since Man may claim a right to understand
What passes understanding. So, succinct
And trimly set in order, to be scanned
And scrutinized, lo—the divine lies linked
Fast to the human, free to move as moves
Its proper match: awhile they keep the
grooves,
Discreetly side by side together pace,
Till sudden comes a stumble incident
Likely enough to Man's weak-footed race,
And he discovers—wings in rudiment,
Such as he boasts, which full-grown, free-
distent
Would lift him skyward, fail of flight while
pent
Within humanity's restricted space.
Abjure each fond attempt to represent
The formless, the illimitable! Trace
No outline, try no hint of human face
Or form or hand!"

VII.

Friend, here's a tracing meant
To help a guess at truth you never knew.
Bend but those eyes now, using mind's eye too,
And note—sufficient for all purposes—
The ground-plan—map you long have yearned
for—yes,
Made out in markings—more what artist
can?—
Goethe's Estate in Weimar,—just a plan!
A. is the House, and B. the Garden-gate,
And C. the Grass-plot—you've the whole
estate
Letter by letter, down to Y. the Pond,
And Z. the Pig-stye. Do you look beyond
The algebraic signs, and captious say
"Is A. the House? But where's the Roof
to A.,
Where's Door, where's Window? Needs
must House have such!"
Ay, that were folly. Why so very much
More foolish than our mortal purblind way
Of seeking in the symbol no mere point
To guide our gaze through what were else
inane,
But things—their solid selves? "Is, joint
by joint,
Orion man-like,—as these dots explain
His constellation? Flesh composed of suns—
How can such be?" exclaim the simple ones.
Look through the sign to the thing signified—
Shown nowise, point by point at best descried,
Each an orb's topmost sparkle: all beside
Its shine is shadow: turn the orb one jot—
Up flies the new flash to reveal 'twas not
The whole sphere late flamboyant in your ken!

VIII.

"What need of symbolizing? Fitlier men
Would take on tongue mere facts—few, faint
and far,
Still facts not fancies: quite enough they
are,
That Power, that Knowledge, and that Will,
—add then
Immensity, Eternity: these jar
Nowise with our permitted thought and
speech.
Why human attributes?"

A myth may teach:
Only, who better would expound it thus
Must be Euripides not Æschylus.

IX.

Boundingly up through Night's wall dense
and dark,
Embattled crags and clouds, outbroke the Sun
Above the conscious earth, and one by one
Her heights and depths absorbed to the last
spark
His fluid glory, from the far fine ridge
Of mountain-granite which, transformed to
gold,
Laughed first the thanks back, to the vale's
dusk fold
On fold of vapour-swathing, like a bridge
Shattered beneath some giant's stamp. Night wist
Her work done and betook herself in mist

To marsh and hollow there to bide her time
Blindly in acquiescence. Everywhere
Did earth acknowledge Sun's embrace sublime
Thrilling her to the heart of things: since there
No ore ran liquid, no spar branched anew,
No arrowy crystal gleamed, but straightway grew
Glad through the inrush—glad nor more nor less
Than, 'neath his gaze, forest and wilderness,
Hill, dale, land, sea, the whole vast stretch and spread,
The universal world of creatures bred
By Sun's munificence, alike gave praise—
All creatures but one only: gaze for gaze,
Joyless and thankless, who—all scowling can—
Protests against the innumerous praises? Man,
Sullen and silent.

Stand thou forth then, state
Thy wrong, thou sole aggrieved—disconsolate—
While every beast, bird, reptile, insect, gay
And glad acknowledges the bounteous day!

X.

Man speaks now: "What avails Sun's earth-felt thrill
To me? Sun penetrates the ore, the plant—
They feel and grow: perchance with subtler skill
He interfuses fly, worm, brute, until
Each favoured object pays life's ministrant
By pressing, in obedience to his will,
Up to completion of the task prescribed,
So stands and stays a type. Myself imbibed
Such influence also, stood and stand complete—
The perfect Man,—head, body, hands and feet,
True to the pattern: but does that suffice?
How of my superadded mind which needs
—Not to be, simply, but to do, and pleads
For—more than knowledge that by some device
Sun quickens matter: mind is nobly fain
To realize the marvel, make—for sense
As mind—the unseen visible, condense
—Myself—Sun's all-pervading influence
So as to serve the needs of mind, explain
What now perplexes. Let the oak increase
His corrugated strength on strength, the palm
Lift joint by joint her fan-fruit, ball and balm,—
Let the coiled serpent bask in bloated peace,—
The eagle, like some skyey derelict,
Drift in the blue, suspended, glorying,—
The lion lord it by the desert-spring,—
What know or care they of the power which pricked
Nothingness to perfection? I, instead,
When all-developed still am found a thing
All-incomplete: for what though flesh had force
Transcending theirs—hands able to unring
The tightened snake's coil, eyes that could outcourse
The eagle's soaring, voice whereat the king
Of carnage couched discrowned? Mind seeks to see,
Touch, understand, by mind inside of me,
The outside mind—whose quickening I attain
To recognize—I only. All in vain
Would mind address itself to render plain
The nature of the essence. Drag what lurks
Behind the operation—that which works
Latently everywhere by outward proof—
Drag that mind forth to face mine? No! aloof
I solely crave that one of all the beams
Which do Sun's work in darkness, at my will
Should operate—myself for once have skill
To realize the energy which streams
Flooding the universe. Above, around,
Beneath—why mocks that mind my own thus found
Simply of service, when the world grows dark,
To half-surmise—were Sun's use understood,
I might demonstrate him supplying food,
Warmth, life, no less the while? To grant one spark
Myself may deal with—make it thaw my blood
And prompt my steps, were truer to the mark

Of mind's requirement than a half-surmise
That somehow secretly is operant
A power all matter feels, mind only tries
To comprehend! Once more—no idle vaunt
'Man comprehends the Sun's self!' Mysteries
At source why probe into? Enough: display,
Make demonstrable, how, by night as day,
Earth's centre and sky's outspan, all's informed
Equally by Sun's efflux!—source from whence
If just one spark I drew, full evidence
Were mine of fire ineffably enthroned—
Sun's self made palpable to Man!"

XI.

Thus moaned
Man till Prometheus helped him,—as we learn,—
Offered an artifice whereby he drew
Sun's rays into a focus,—plain and true,
The very Sun in little: made fire burn
And henceforth do Man service—glass-conglobed
Though to a pin-point circle—all the same
Comprising the Sun's self, but Sun disrobed
Of that else-unconceived essential flame
Borne by no naked sight. Shall mind's eye strive
Achingly to companion as it may
The supersubtle effluence, and contrive
To follow beam and beam upon their way
Hand-breadth by hand-breadth, till sense faint—confessed
Frustrate, eluded by unknown unguessed
Infinitude of action? Idle quest!
Rather ask aid from optics. Sense, descry
The spectrum—mind, infer immensity!
Little? In little, light, warmth, life are blessed—
Which, in the large, who sees to bless? Not I
More than yourself: so, good my friend, keep still
Trustful with—me? with thee, sage Mandeville!

WITH DANIEL BARTOLI.[1]

[Born at Ferrara, 1608; died at Rome, 1685. Rector of the College of Jesuits at Rome. He wrote a history of the Jesuits, and various treatises on physics.]

I.

Don, the divinest women that have walked
Our world were scarce those saints of whom we talked.
My saint, for instance—worship if you will!
'Tis pity poets need historians' skill:
What legendary's worth a chronicle?

II.

Come, now! A great lord once upon a time
Visited—oh a king, of kings the prime,
To sign a treaty such as never was:
For the king's minister had brought to pass
That this same duke—so style him—must engage
Two of his dukedoms as an heritage
After his death to this exorbitant
Craver of kingship. "Let who lacks go scant,
Who owns much, give the more to!" Why rebuke?
So bids the devil, so obeys the duke.

III.

Now, as it happened, at his sister's house
—Duchess herself—indeed the very spouse
Of the king's uncle,—while the deed of gift
Whereby our duke should cut his rights adrift
Was drawing, getting ripe to sign and seal—
What does the frozen heart but uncongeal
And, shaming his transcendent kin and kith,
Whom do the duke's eyes make acquaintance with?

[1] A learned and ingenious writer. "Fu Gesuita e Storico della Compagnia; onde scrisse lunghissime storie, le quali sarebbero lette se non fossero ripiene traboccanti di tutte le superstizioni . . . Egli vi ha ficcati dentro tanti miracoloni, che diviene una noia insopportabile a chiunque voglia leggere quelle storie: e anche a me, non mi bastò l'animo di proseguire molto avanti."—*Angelo Cerutti.* (R. B.)

A girl. "What, sister, may this wonder be?"
"Nobody! Good as beautiful is she,
With gifts that match her goodness, no faint flaw
I' the white: she were the pearl you think you saw,
But that she is—what corresponds to white?
Some other stone, the true pearl's opposite,
As cheap as pearls are costly. She's—now, guess
Her parentage! Once — twice — thrice? Foiled, confess!
Drugs, duke, her father deals in—faugh, the scents!—
Manna and senna—such medicaments
For payment he compounds you. Stay—stay—stay!
I'll have no rude speech wrong her! Whither away,
The hot-head? Ah, the scapegrace! She deserves
Respect — compassion, rather! Right it serves
My folly, trusting secrets to a fool!
Already at it, is he? She keeps cool—
Helped by her fan's spread. Well, our state atones
For thus much license, and words break no bones!"
(Hearts, though, sometimes.)

IV.

Next morn 'twas "Reason, rate,
Rave, sister, on till doomsday! Sure as fate,
I wed that woman—what a woman is
Now that I know, who never knew till this!"
So swore the duke. "I wed her: once again—
Rave, rate, and reason—spend your breath in vain!"

V.

At once was made a contract firm and fast,
Published the banns were, only marriage, last,
Required completion when the Church's rite
Should bless and bid depart, make happy quite
The coupled man and wife for evermore:
Which rite was soon to follow. Just before—
All things at all but end—the folk o' the bride
Flocked to a summons. Pomp the duke defied:
"Of ceremony—so much as empowers,
Nought that exceeds, suits best a tie like ours—"
He smiled—"all else were mere futility.
We vow, God hears us: God and you and I—
Let the world keep at distance! This is why
We choose the simplest forms that serve to bind
Lover and lover of the human kind,
No care of what degree—of kings or clowns—
Come blood and breeding. Courtly smiles and frowns
Miss of their mark, would idly soothe or strike
My style and yours—in one style merged alike—
God's man and woman merely. Long ago
'Twas rounded in my ears 'Duke, wherefore slow
To use a privilege? Needs must one who reigns
Pay reigning's due: since statecraft so ordains—
Wed for the commonweal's sake! law prescribes
One wife: but to submission license bribes
Unruly nature: mistresses accept
—Well, at discretion!' Prove I so inept
A scholar, thus instructed? Dearest, be
Wife and all mistresses in one to me,
Now, henceforth, and forever!" So smiled he.

VI.

Good: but the minister, the crafty one,
Got ear of what was doing—all but done—
Not sooner, though, than the king's very self,
Warned by the sister on how sheer a shelf
Royalty's ship was like to split. "I bar
The abomination! Mix with muck my star?
Shall earth behold prodigiously enorbed
An upstart marsh-born meteor sun-absorbed?
Nuptial me no such nuptials!" "Past dispute,
Majesty speaks with wisdom absolute,"

Admired the minister: "yet, all the same,
I would we may not—while we play his game,
The ducal meteor's—also lose our own,
The solar monarch's: we relieve your throne
Of an ungracious presence, like enough:
Baulked of his project he departs in huff,
And so cuts short—dare I remind the king?—
Our not so unsuccessful bargaining.
The contract for eventual heritage
Happens to *pari passu* reach the stage
Attained by just this other contract,—each
Unfixed by signature though fast in speech.
Off goes the duke in dudgeon—off withal
Go with him his two dukedoms past recall.
You save a fool from tasting folly's fruit,
Obtain small thanks thereby, and lose to boot
Sagacity's reward. The jest is grim:
The man will mulct you—for amercing him?
Nay, for . . . permit a poor similitude!
A witless wight in some fantastic mood
Would drown himself: you plunge into the wave,
Pluck forth the undeserving: he, you save,
Pulls you clean under also for your pains.
Sire, little need that I should tax my brains
To help your inspiration!" "Let him sink!
Always contriving"—hints the royal wink—
"To keep ourselves dry while we claim his clothes."

VII.

Next day, the appointed day for plighting troths
At eve,—so little time to lose, you see,
Before the Church should weld indissolubly
Bond into bond, wed these who, side by side,
Sit each by other, bold groom, blushing bride,—
At the preliminary banquet, graced
By all the lady's kinsfolk come in haste
To share her triumph,—lo, a thunderclap!
"Who importunes now?" "Such is my mishap—
In the king's name! No need that any stir
Except this lady!" bids the minister:
"With her I claim a word apart, no more:
For who gainsays—a guard is at the door.
Hold, duke! Submit you, lady, as I bow
To him whose mouthpiece speaks his pleasure now!
It well may happen I no whit arrest
Your marriage: be it so,—we hope the best!
By your leave, gentles! Lady, pray you, hence!
Duke, with my soul and body's deference!"

VIII.

Doors shut, mouth opens and persuasion flows
Copiously forth. "What flesh shall dare oppose
The king's command? The matter in debate
—How plain it is! Yourself shall arbitrate,
Determine. Since the duke affects to rate
His prize in you beyond all goods of earth,
Accounts as nought old gains of rank and birth,
Ancestral obligation, recent fame,
(We know his feats)—nay, ventures to disclaim
Our will and pleasure almost—by report—
Waives in your favour dukeliness, in short,—
We—('tis the king speaks)—who might forthwith stay
Such suicidal purpose, brush away
A bad example shame would else record,—
Lean to indulgence rather. At his word
We take the duke: allow him to complete
The cession of his dukedoms, leave our feet
Their footstool when his own head, safe in vault,
Sleeps sound. Nay, would the duke repair his fault
Handsomely, and our forfeited esteem
Recover,—what if wisely he redeem
The past,—in earnest of good faith, at once
Give us such jurisdiction for the nonce
As may suffice—prevent occasion slip—
And constitute our actual ownership?
Concede this—straightway be the marriage blessed
By warrant of this paper! Things at rest,
This paper duly signed, down drops the bar,
To-morrow you become—from what you are,
The druggist's daughter—not the duke's mere spouse,
But the king's own adopted: heart and house

Open to you—the idol of a court
'Which heaven might copy'—sing our poet-sort.
In this emergency, on you depends
The issue: plead what bliss the king intends!
Should the duke frown, should arguments and prayers,
Nay, tears if need be, prove in vain,—who cares?
We leave the duke to his obduracy,
Companionless,—you, madam, follow me
Without, where divers of the body-guard
Wait signal to enforce the king's award
Of strict seclusion: over you at least
Vibratingly the sceptre threats increased
Precipitation! How avert its crash?"

IX.

"Re-enter, sir! A hand that's calm, not rash,
Averts it!" quietly the lady said.
"Yourself shall witness."
At the table's head
Where, mid the hushed guests, still the duke sat glued
In blank bewilderment, his spouse pursued
Her speech to end—syllabled quietude.

X.

"Duke, I, your duchess of a day, could take
The hand you proffered me for love's sole sake,
Conscious my love matched yours; as you, myself
Would waive, when need were, all but love—from pelf
To potency. What fortune brings about
Haply in some far future, finds me out,
Faces me on a sudden here and now.
The better! Read—if beating heart allow—
Read this, and bid me rend to rags the shame!
I and your conscience—hear and grant our claim!
Never dare alienate God's gift you hold
Simply in trust for him! Choose muck for gold?
Could you so stumble in your choice, cajoled
By what I count my least of worthiness
—The youth, the beauty,—you renounce them—yes,
With all that's most too: love as well you lose,
Slain by what slays in you the honour! Choose!
Dear—yet my husband—dare I love you yet?"

XI.

How the duke's wrath o'erboiled,—words, words and yet
More words,—I spare you such fool's fever-fret.
They were not of one sort at all, one size,
As souls go—he and she. 'Tis said, the eyes
Of all the lookers-on let tears fall fast.
The minister was mollified at last:
"Take a day,—two days even, ere through pride
You perish,—two days' counsel—then decide!"

XII.

—"If I shall save his honour and my soul?
Husband,—this one last time,—you tear the scroll?
Farewell, duke! Sir, I follow in your train!"

XIII.

So she went forth: they never met again
The duke and she. The world paid compliment
(Is it worth noting?) when, next day, she sent
Certain gifts back—"jewelry fit to deck
Whom you call wife." I know not round what neck
They took to sparkling, in good time—weeks thence.

XIV.

Of all which was the pleasant consequence,
So much and no more—that a fervid youth,
Big-hearted boy,—but ten years old, in truth,—
Laid this to heart and loved, as boyhood can,
The unduchessed lady: boy and lad grew man:
He loved as man perchance may: did meanwhile
Good soldier-service, managed to beguile
The years, no few, until he found a chance:
Then, as at trumpet-summons to advance,
Outbroke the love that stood at arms so long,

Brooked no withstanding longer. They were wed.
Whereon from camp and court alike he fled,
Renounced the sun-king, dropped off into night,
Evermore lost, a ruined satellite:
And, oh, the exquisite deliciousness
That lapped him in obscurity! You guess
Such joy is fugitive: she died full soon.
He did his best to die—as sun, so moon
Left him, turned dusk to darkness absolute.
Failing of death—why, saintship seemed to suit:
Yes, your sort, Don! He trembled on the verge
Of monkhood: trick of cowl and taste of scourge
He tried: then, kicked not at the pricks perverse,
But took again, for better or for worse,
The old way in the world, and, much the same
Man o' the outside, fairly played life's game.

XV.

"Now, Saint Scholastica,[1] what time she fared
In Paynimrie, behold, a lion glared
Right in her path! Her waist she promptly strips
Of girdle, binds his teeth within his lips,
And, leashed all lamblike, to the Soldan's court
Leads him." Ay, many a legend of the sort
Do you praiseworthily authenticate:
Spare me the rest. This much of no debate
Admits: my lady flourished in grand days
When to be duchess was to dance the hays
Up, down, across the heaven amid its host:
While to be hailed the sun's own self almost—
So close the kinship—was—was—

Saint, for this,
Be yours the feet I stoop to—kneel and kiss!
So human? Then the mouth too, if you will!
Thanks to no legend but a chronicle.

[1] St. Benedict's sister.

XVI.

One leans to like the duke, too: up we'll patch
Some sort of saintship for him—not to match
Hers—but man's best and woman's worst amount
So nearly to the same thing, that we count
In man a miracle of faithfulness
If, while unfaithful somewhat, he lay stress
On the main fact that love, when love indeed,
Is wholly solely love from first to last—
Truth—all the rest a lie. Too likely, fast
Enough that necklace went to grace the throat
—Let's say, of such a dancer as makes doat
The senses when the soul is satisfied—
Trogalia, say the Greeks—a sweetmeat tried
Approvingly by sated tongue and teeth,
Once body's proper meal consigned beneath
Such unconsidered munching.

XVII.

Fancy's flight
Makes me a listener when, some sleepless night,
The duke reviewed his memories, and aghast
Found that the Present intercepts the Past
With such effect as when a cloud enwraps
The moon and, moon-suffused, plays moon perhaps
To who walks under, till comes, late or soon,
A stumble: up he looks, and lo, the moon
Calm, clear, convincingly herself once more!
How could he 'scape the cloud that thrust between
Him and effulgence? Speak, fool—duke, I mean!

XVIII.

"Who bade you come, brisk-marching bold she-shape,
A terror with those black-balled worlds of eyes,
That black hair bristling solid-built from nape
To crown it coils about? O dread surmise!
Take, tread on, trample under past escape
Your capture, spoil and trophy! Do—devise
Insults for one who, fallen once, ne'er shall rise!

"Mock on, triumphant o'er the prostrate shame!
Laugh 'Here lies he among the false to Love—
Love's loyal liegeman once: the very same
Who, scorning his weak fellows, towered above
Inconstancy: yet why his faith defame?
Our eagle's victor was at least no dove,
No dwarfish knight picked up our giant's glove—

"'When, putting prowess to the proof, faith urged
Her champion to the challenge: had it chanced
That merely virtue, wisdom, beauty—merged
All in one woman—merely these advanced
Their claim to conquest,—hardly had he purged
His mind of memories, dearnesses enhanced
Rather than harmed by death, nor, disentranced,

"'Promptly had he abjured the old pretence
To prove his kind's superior—first to last
Display erect on his heart's eminence
An altar to the never-dying Past.
For such feat faith might boast fit play of fence
And easily disarm the iconoclast
Called virtue, wisdom, beauty: impudence

"'Fought in their stead, and how could faith but fall?
There came a bold she-shape brisk-marching, bent
No inch of her imperious stature, tall
As some war-engine from whose top was sent
One shattering volley out of eye's black ball,
And prone lay faith's defender!' Mockery spent?
Malice discharged in full? In that event,

"My queenly impudence, I cover close,
I wrap me round with love of your black hair,
Black eyes, black every wicked inch of those
Limbs' war-tower tallness: so much truth lives there
'Neath the dead heap of lies. And yet—who knows?
What if such things are? No less, such things were.
Then was the man your match whom now you dare

"Treat as existent still. A second truth!
They held—this heap of lies you rightly scorn—
A man who had approved himself in youth
More than a match for—you? for sea-foam-born
Venus herself: you conquer him forsooth?
'Tis me his ghost: he died since left and lorn,
As needs must Samson when his hair is shorn.

"Some day, and soon, be sure himself will rise,
Called into life by her who long ago
Left his soul whiling time in flesh-disguise.
Ghosts tired of waiting can play tricks, you know!
Tread, trample me—such sport we ghosts devise,
Waiting the morn-star's re-appearance—though
You think we vanish scared by the cock's crow."

WITH CHRISTOPHER SMART.

[An unfortunate poet (1722–1771) known to all Boswellians from anecdotes in the great Biography. He was a Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and until he lost his reason a very indifferent versifier. He married a daughter of Newbery the publisher, and suffered much poverty. He lives as the author of the "Song to David," a series of magnificent stanzas composed while their author was in confinement for unsoundness of mind.]

I.

It seems as if . . . or did the actual chance
Startle me and perplex? Let truth be said!
How might this happen? Dreaming, blindfold led
By visionary hand, did soul's advance

Precede my body's, gain inheritance
Of fact by fancy—so that when I read
At length with waking eyes your Song, instead
Of mere bewilderment, with me first glance
Was but full recognition that in trance
Or merely thought's adventure some old day
Of dim and done-with boyishness, or—well,
Why might it not have been, the miracle
Broke on me as I took my sober way
Through veritable regions of our earth
And made discovery, many a wondrous one?

II.

Anyhow, fact or fancy, such its birth:
I was exploring some huge house, had gone
Through room and room complacently, no dearth
Anywhere of the signs of decent taste,
Adequate culture: wealth had run to waste
Nowise, nor penury was proved by stint:
All showed the Golden Mean without a hint
Of brave extravagance that breaks the rule.
The master of the mansion was no fool
Assuredly, no genius just as sure!
Safe mediocrity had scorned the lure
Of now too much and now too little cost,
And satisfied me sight was never lost
Of moderate design's accomplishment
In calm completeness. On and on I went,
With no more hope than fear of what came next,
Till lo, I push a door, sudden uplift
A hanging, enter, chance upon a shift
Indeed of scene! So—thus it is thou deck'st,
High heaven, our low earth's brick-and-mortar work?

III.

It was the Chapel. That a star, from murk
Which hid, should flashingly emerge at last,
Were small surprise: but from broad day I passed
Into a presence that turned shine to shade.
There fronted me the Rafael Mother-Maid,
Never to whom knelt votarist in shrine
By Nature's bounty helped, by Art's divine
More varied—beauty with magnificence—
Than this: from floor to roof one evidence
Of how far earth may rival heaven. No niche
Where glory was not prisoned to enrich
Man's gaze with gold and gems, no space but glowed
With colour, gleamed with carving—hues which owed
Their outburst to a brush the painter fed
With rainbow-substance—rare shapes never wed
To actual flesh and blood, which, brain-born once,
Became the sculptor's dowry, Art's response
To earth's despair. And all seemed old yet new:
Youth,—in the marble's curve, the canvas' hue,
Apparent,—wanted not the crowning thrill
Of age the consecrator. Hands long still
Had worked here—could it be, what lent them skill
Retained a power to supervise, protect,
Enforce new lessons with the old, connect
Our life with theirs? No merely modern touch
Told me that here the artist, doing much,
Elsewhere did more, perchance does better, lives—
So needs must learn.

IV.

Well, these provocatives
Having fulfilled their office, forth I went
Big with anticipation—well-nigh fear—
Of what next room and next for startled eyes
Might have in store, surprise beyond surprise.
Next room and next and next—what followed here?
Why, nothing! not one object to arrest
My passage—everywhere too manifest
The previous decent null and void of best
And worst, mere ordinary right and fit,
Calm commonplace which neither missed, nor hit
Inch-high, inch-low, the placid mark proposed.

V.

Armed with this instance, have I diagnosed
Your case, my Christopher? The man was sound
And sane at starting: all at once the ground

Gave way beneath his step, a certain smoke
Curled up and caught him, or perhaps down broke
A fireball wrapping flesh and spirit both
In conflagration. Then—as heaven were loth
To linger—let earth understand too well
How heaven at need can operate—off fell
The flame-robe, and the untransfigured man
Resumed sobriety,—as he began,
So did he end nor alter pace, not he!

VI.

Now, what I fain would know is—could it be
That he—whoe'er he was that furnished forth
The Chapel, making thus, from South to North,
Rafael touch Leighton, Michelagnolo
Join Watts, was found but once combining so
The elder and the younger, taking stand
On Art's supreme,—or that yourself who sang
A Song where flute-breath silvers trumpet-clang,
And stations you for once on either hand
With Milton and with Keats, empowered to claim
Affinity on just one point—(or blame
Or praise my judgment, thus it fronts you full)—
How came it you resume the void and null,
Subside to insignificance,—live, die
—Proved plainly two mere mortals who drew nigh
One moment—that, to Art's best hierarchy,
This, to the superhuman poet-pair?
What if, in one point only, then and there
The otherwise all-unapproachable
Allowed impingement? Does the sphere pretend
To span the cube's breadth, cover end to end
The plane with its embrace? No, surely! Still,
Contact is contact, sphere's touch no whit less
Than cube's superimposure. Such success
Befell Smart only out of throngs between
Milton and Keats that donned the singing-dress—
Smart, solely of such songmen, pierced the screen
'Twixt thing and word, lit language straight from soul,—
Left no fine film-flake on the naked coal
Live from the censer—shapely or uncouth,
Fire-suffused through and through, one blaze of truth
Undeadened by a lie,—(you have my mind)—
For, think! this blaze outleapt with black behind
And blank before, when Hayley and the rest . . .
But let the dead successors worst and best
Bury their dead: with life be my concern—
Yours with the fire-flame: what I fain would learn
Is just—(suppose me haply ignorant
Down to the common knowledge, doctors vaunt)
Just this—why only once the fire-flame was:
No matter if the marvel came to pass
The way folk judged—if power too long suppressed
Broke loose and maddened, as the vulgar guessed,
Or simply brain-disorder (doctors said),
A turmoil of the particles disturbed
Brain's workaday performance in your head,
Spurred spirit to wild action health had curbed:
And so verse issued in a cataract
Whence prose, before and after, unperturbed
Was wont to wend its way. Concede the fact
That here a poet was who always could—
Never before did—never after would—
Achieve the feat: how were such fact explained?

VII.

Was it that when, by rarest chance, there fell
Disguise from Nature, so that Truth remained
Naked, and whoso saw for once could tell
Us others of her majesty and might
In large, her lovelinesses infinite
In little,—straight you used the power wherewith
Sense, penetrating as through rind to pith

Each object, thoroughly revealed might view
And comprehend the old things thus made new,
So that while eye saw, soul to tongue could trust
Thing which struck word out, and once more adjust
Real vision to right language, till heaven's vault
Pompous with sunset, storm-stirred sea's assault
On the swilled rock-ridge, earth's embosomed brood
Of tree and flower and weed, with all the life
That flies or swims or crawls, in peace or strife,
Above, below,—each had its note and name
For Man to know by,—Man who, now—the same
As erst in Eden, needs that all he sees
Be named him ere he note by what degrees
Of strength and beauty to its end Design
Ever thus operates—(your thought and mine,
No matter for the many dissident)—
So did you sing your Song, so truth found vent
In words for once with you?

VIII.

Then—back was furled
The robe thus thrown aside, and straight the world
Darkened into the old oft-catalogued
Repository of things that sky, wave, land,
Or show or hide, clear late, accretion-clogged
Now, just as long ago, by tellings and
Re-tellings to satiety, which strike
Muffled upon the ear's drum. Very like
None was so startled as yourself when friends
Came, hailed your fast-returning wits: "Health mends
Importantly, for—to be plain with you—
This scribble on the wall was done—in lieu
Of pen and paper—with—ha, ha!—your key
Denting it on the wainscot! Do you see
How wise our caution was? Thus much we stopped
Of babble that had else grown print: and lopped
From your trim bay-tree this unsightly bough—
Smart's who translated Horace! Write us now" . . .
Why, what Smart did write—never afterward
One line to show that he, who paced the sward,
Had reached the zenith from his madhouse cell.

IX.

Was it because you judged (I know full well
You never had the fancy)—judged—as some—
That who makes poetry must reproduce
Thus ever and thus only, as they come,
Each strength, each beauty, everywhere diffuse
Throughout creation, so that eye and ear,
Seeing and hearing, straight shall recognize,
At touch of just a trait, the strength appear,—
Suggested by a line's lapse see arise
All evident the beauty,—fresh surprise
Startling at fresh achievement? "So, indeed,
Wallows the whale's bulk in the waste of brine,
Nor otherwise its feather-tufts make fine
Wild Virgin's Bower when stars faint off to seed!"
(My prose—your poetry I dare not give,
Purpling too much my mere grey argument.)
—Was it because you judged—when fugitive
Was glory found, and wholly gone and spent
Such power of startling up deaf ear, blind eye,
At truth's appearance,—that you humbly bent
The head and, bidding vivid work good-bye,
Doffed lyric dress and trod the world once more
A drab-clothed decent proseman as before?
Strengths, beauties, by one word's flash thus laid bare
—That was effectual service: made aware
Of strengths and beauties, Man but hears the text,
Awaits your teaching. Nature? What comes next?

Why all the strength and beauty?—to be shown
Thus in one word's flash, thenceforth let alone
By Man who needs must deal with aught that's known
Never so lately and so little? Friend,
First give us knowledge, then appoint its use!
Strength, beauty are the means: ignore their end?
As well you stopped at proving how profuse
Stones, sticks, nay stubble lie to left and right
Ready to help the builder,—careless quite
If he should take, or leave the same to strew
Earth idly,—as by word's flash bring in view
Strength, beauty, then bid who beholds the same
Go on beholding. Why gains unemployed?
Nature was made to be by Man enjoyed
First; followed duly by enjoyment's fruit,
Instruction—haply leaving joy behind:
And you, the instructor, would you slack pursuit
Of the main prize, as poet help mankind
Just to enjoy, there leave them? Play the fool,
Abjuring a superior privilege?
Please simply when your function is to rule—
By thought incite to deed? From edge to edge
Of earth's round, strength and beauty everywhere
Pullulate—and must you particularize
All, each and every apparition? Spare
Yourself and us the trouble! Ears and eyes
Want so much strength and beauty, and no less
Nor more, to learn life's lesson by. Oh, yes—
The other method's favoured in our day!
The end ere the beginning: as you may,
Master the heavens before you study earth,
Make you familiar with the meteor's birth
Ere you descend to scrutinize the rose!
I say, o'erstep no least one of the rows
That lead man from the bottom where he plants
Foot first of all, to life's last ladder-top:
Arrived there, vain enough will seem the vaunts
Of those who say—"We scale the skies, then drop
To earth—to find, how all things there are loth
To answer heavenly law: we understand
The meteor's course, and lo, the rose's growth—
How other than should be by law's command!"
Would not you tell such—"Friends, beware lest fume
Offuscate sense: learn earth first ere presume
To teach heaven legislation. Law must be
Active in earth or nowhere: earth you see,—
Or there or not at all, Will, Power and Love
Admit discovery,—as below, above
Seek next law's confirmation! But reverse
The order, where's the wonder things grow worse
Than, by the law your fancy formulates,
They should be? Cease from anger at the fates
Which thwart themselves so madly. Live and learn,
Not first learn and then live, is our concern.

WITH GEORGE BUBB DODINGTON.

[See "Dictionary of National Biography," vol. xv.; also the thin volume of his Memoirs or Diary first published in 1784. The author was born 1691, and died 1762. He early became a politician, and attached himself to Walpole. He was accomplished, profuse, and corrupt, and has become by common consent of historians a convenient by-word for eighteenth-century immoralities of public men.]

I.

Ah, George Bubb Dodington Lord Melcombe,—no,
Yours was the wrong way!—always understand,
Supposing that permissibly you planned
How statesmanship—your trade—in outward show

Might figure as inspired by simple zeal
For serving country, king, and commonweal,
(Though service tire to death the body, tease
The soul from out an o'ertasked patriot-drudge)
And yet should prove zeal's outward show agrees
In all respects—right reason being judge—
With inward care that, while the statesman spends
Body and soul thus freely for the sake
Of public good, his private welfare take
No harm by such devotedness. Intends
Scripture aught else—let captious folk inquire—
Which teaches "Labourers deserve their hire,
And who neglects his household bears the bell
Away of sinning from an infidel"?
Wiselier would fools that carp bestow a thought
How birds build nests; at outside, roughly wrought,
Twig knots with twig, loam plasters up each chink,
Leaving the inmate rudely lodged—you think?
Peep but inside! That specious rude-and-rough
Covers a domicile where downy fluff
Embeds the ease-deserving architect,
Who toiled and moiled not merely to effect
'Twixt sprig and spray a stop-gap in the teeth
Of wind and weather, guard what swung beneath
From upset only, but contrived himself
A snug interior, warm and soft and sleek.
Of what material? Oh, for that, you seek
How nature prompts each volatile! Thus—pelf
Smoothens the human mudlark's lodging, power
Demands some hardier wrappage to embrace
Robuster heart-beats: rock, not tree nor tower,
Contents the building eagle: rook shoves close
To brother rook on branch, while crow morose
Apart keeps balance perched on topmost bough.
No sort of bird but suits his taste somehow:
Nay, Darwin tells of such as love the bower—
His bower-birds opportunely yield us yet
The lacking instance when at loss to get
A feathered parallel to what we find
The secret motor of some mighty mind
That worked such wonders—all for vanity!
Worked them to haply figure in the eye
Of intimates as first of—doers' kind?
Actors', that work in earnest sportively,
Paid by a sourish smile. How says the Sage?
Birds born to strut prepare a platform-stage
With sparkling stones and speckled shells, all sorts
Of slimy rubbish, odds and ends and orts,
Whereon to pose and posture and engage
The priceless female simper.

II.

I have gone
Thus into detail, George Bubb Dodington,
Lest, when I take you presently to task
For the wrong way of working, you should ask
"What fool conjectures that profession means
Performance? that who goes behind the scenes
Finds,—acting over,—still the soot-stuff screens
Othello's visage, still the self-same cloak's
Bugle-bright-blackness half reveals half chokes
Hamlet's emotion, as ten minutes since?"
No, each resumes his garb, stands—Moor or prince—
Decently draped: just so with statesmanship
All outside show, in short, is sham—why wince?
Concede me—while our parley lasts! You trip
Afterwards—lay but this to heart! (there lurks
Somewhere in all of us a lump which irks
Somewhat the sprightliest-scheming brain that's bent
On brave adventure, would but heart consent!)
—Here trip you, that—your aim allowed as right—
Your means thereto were wrong. Come, we, this night,
Profess one purpose, hold one principle,
Are at odds only as to—not the will
But way of winning solace for ourselves
—No matter if the ore for which zeal delves

Be gold or coprolite, while zeal's pretence
Is—we do good to men at—whose expense
But ours? who tire the body, tease the soul,
Simply that, running, we may reach fame's goal
And wreathe at last our brows with bay—the State's
Disinterested slaves, nay—please the Fates—
Saviours and nothing less: such lot has been!
Statesmanship triumphs pedestalled, serene,—
O happy consummation!—brought about
By managing with skill the rabble-rout
For which we labour (never mind the name—
People or populace, for praise or blame)
Making them understand—their heaven, their hell,
Their every hope and fear is ours as well.
Man's cause—what other can we have at heart?
Whence follows that the necessary part
High o'er Man's head we play,—and freelier breathe
Just that the multitude which gasps beneath
May reach the level where unstifled stand
Ourselves at vantage to put forth a hand,
Assist the prostrate public. 'Tis by right
Merely of such pretence, we reach the height
Where storms abound, to brave—nay, court their stress,
Though all too well aware—of pomp the less,
Of peace the more! But who are we, to spurn
For peace' sake, duty's pointing? Up, then—earn
Albeit no prize we may but martyrdom!
Now, such fit height to launch salvation from,
How get and gain? Since help must needs be craved
By would-be saviours of the else-unsaved,
How coax them to co-operate, lend a lift,
Kneel down and let us mount?

III.

You say "Make shift
By sham—the harsh word: preach and teach, persuade
Somehow the Public—not despising aid
Of salutary artifice—we seek
Solely their good: our strength would raise the weak,
Our cultivated knowledge supplement
Their rudeness, rawness: why to us were lent
Ability except to come in use?
Who loves his kind must by all means induce
That kind to let his love play freely, press
In Man's behalf to full performance!"

IV.

Yes—
Yes, George, we know!—whereat they hear, believe,
And bend the knee, and on the neck receive
Who fawned and cringed to purpose? Not so, George!
Try simple falsehood on shrewd folk who forge
Lies of superior fashion day by day
And hour by hour? With craftsmen versed as they
What chance of competition when the tools
Only a novice wields? Are knaves such fools?
Disinterested patriots, spare your tongue
The tones thrice-silvery, cheek save smiles it flung
Pearl-like profuse to swine—a herd, whereof
No unit needs be taught, his neighbour's trough
Scarce holds for who but grunts and whines the husks
Due to a wrinkled snout that shows sharp tusks.
No animal—much less our lordly Man—
Obeys its like: with strength all rule began,
The stoutest awes the pasture. Soon succeeds
Discrimination,—nicer power Man needs
To rule him than is bred of bone and thew:
Intelligence must move strength's self. This too
Lasts but its time: the multitude at length
Looks inside for intelligence and strength
And finds them here and there to pick and choose:
"All at your service, mine, see!" Ay, but who's
My George, at this late day, to make his boast
"In strength, intelligence, I rule the roast,
Beat, all and some, the ungraced who crowd your ranks?"
"Oh, but I love, would lead you, gain your thanks

By unexampled yearning for Man's sake—
Passion that solely waits your help to take
Effect in action!" George, which one of us
But holds with his own heart communion thus:
"I am, if not of men the first and best,
Still—to receive enjoyment—properest:
Which since by force I cannot, nor by wit
Most likely—craft must serve in place of it.
Flatter, cajole! If so I bring within
My net the gains which wit and force should win,
What hinders?" 'Tis a trick we know of old:
Try, George, some other of tricks manifold!
The multitude means mass and mixture—right
Are mixtures simple, pray, or composite?
Dive into Man, your medley: see the waste!
Sloth-stifled genius, energy disgraced
By ignorance, high aims with sorry skill,
Will without means and means in want of will
—Sure we might fish, from out the mothers' sons
That welter thus, a dozen Dodingtons!
Why call up Dodington, and none beside,
To take his seat upon our backs and ride
As statesman conquering and to conquer? Well,
The last expedient, which must needs excel
Those old ones—this it is,—at any rate
To-day's conception thus I formulate:
As simple force has been replaced, just so
Must simple wit be: men have got to know
Such wit as what you boast is nowise held
The wonder once it was, but, paralleled
Too plentifully, counts not,—puts to shame
Modest possessors like yourself who claim,
By virtue of it merely, power and place
—Which means the sweets of office. Since our race
Teems with the like of you, some special gift,
Your very own, must coax our hands to lift,
And backs to bear you: is it just and right
To privilege your nature?

v.

"State things quite
Other than so"—make answer! "I pretend
No such community with men. Perpend
My key to domination! Who would use
Man for his pleasure needs must introduce
The element that awes Man. Once for all,
His nature owns a Supernatural
In fact as well as phrase—which found must be
—Where, in this doubting age? Old mystery
Has served its turn—seen through and sent adrift
To nothingness: new wizard-craft makes shift
Nowadays shorn of help by robe and book,—
Otherwise, elsewhere, for success must look
Than chalked-ring, incantation-gibberish.
Somebody comes to conjure: that's he? Pish!
He's like the roomful of rapt gazers,—there's
No sort of difference in the garb he wears
From ordinary dressing,—gesture, speech,
Deportment, just like those of all and each
That eye their master of the minute. Stay!
What of the something—call it how you may—
Uncanny in the—quack? That's easy said!
Notice how the Professor turns no head
And yet takes cognizance of who accepts,
Denies, is puzzled as to the adept's
Supremacy, yields up or lies in wait
To trap the trickster! Doubtless, out of date
Are dealings with the devil: yet, the stir
Of mouth, its smile half smug half sinister,
Mock-modest boldness masked in diffidence,—
What if the man have—who knows how or whence?—
Confederate potency unguessed by us—
Prove no such cheat as he pretends?"

vi.

Ay, thus
Had but my George played statesmanship's new card
That carries all! "Since we"—avers the Bard—
"All of us have one human heart"—as good
As say—by all of us is understood
Right and wrong, true and false—in rough, at least,
We own a common conscience. God, man, beast—
How should we qualify the statesman-shape
I fancy standing with our world agape?

Disguise, flee, fight against with tooth and nail
The outrageous designation! "Quack" men quail
Before? You see, a little year ago
They heard him thunder at the thing which, lo,
To-day he vaunts for unscathed, while what erst
Heaven-high he lauded, lies hell-low, accursed!
And yet where's change? Who, awe-struck, cares to point
Critical finger at a dubious joint
In armour, true *æs triplex*, breast and back
Binding about, defiant of attack,
An imperturbability that's—well,
Or innocence or impudence—how tell
One from the other? Could ourselves broach lies,
Yet brave mankind with those unaltered eyes,
Those lips that keep the quietude of truth?
Dare we attempt the like? What quick uncouth
Disturbance of thy smug economy,
O coward visage! Straight would all descry
Back on the man's brow the boy's blush once more!
No: he goes deeper—could our sense explore—
Finds conscience beneath conscience such as ours.
Genius is not so rare,—prodigious powers—
Well, others boast such,—but a power like this
Mendacious intrepidity—*quid vis?*
Besides, imposture plays another game,
Admits of no diversion from its aim
Of captivating hearts, sets zeal a-flare
In every shape at every turn,—nowhere
Allows subsidence into ash. By stress
Of what does guile succeed but earnestness,
Earnest word, look and gesture? Touched with aught
But earnestness, the levity were fraught
With ruin to guile's film-work. Grave is guile;
Here no act wants its qualifying smile,
Its covert pleasantry to neutralize
The outward ardour. Can our chief despise
Even while most he seems to adulate?
As who should say "What though it be my fate
To deal with fools? Among the crowd must lurk
Some few with faculty to judge my work
Spite of its way which suits, they understand,
The crass majority:—the Sacred Band,
No duping them forsooth!" So tells a touch
Of subintelligential nod and wink—
Turning foes friends. Coarse flattery moves the gorge:
Mine were the mode to awe the many, George!
They guess you half despise them while most bent
On demonstrating that your sole intent
Strives for their service. Sneer at them? Yourself
'Tis you disparage,—tricksy as an elf,
Scorning what most you strain to bring to pass,
Laughingly careless,—triply cased in brass,—
While pushing strenuous to the end in view.
What follows? Why, you formulate within
The vulgar headpiece this conception "Win
A master-mind to serve us needs we must,
One who, from motives we but take on trust,
Acts strangelier—haply wiselier than we know—
Stronglier, for certain. Did he say 'I throw
Aside my good for yours, in all I do
Care nothing for myself and all for you'—
We should both understand and disbelieve:
Said he 'Your good I laugh at in my sleeve,
My own it is I solely labour at,
Pretending yours the while'—that, even that
We, understanding well, give credence to,
And so will none of it. But here 'tis through
Our recognition of his service, wage
Well earned by work, he mounts to such a stage
Above competitors as all save Bubb
Would agonize to keep. Yet,—here's the rub—
So slightly does he hold by our esteem
Which solely fixed him fast there, that we seem

Mocked every minute to our face, by gibe
And jest—scorn insuppressive: what ascribe
The rashness to? Our pay and praise to boot—
Do these avail him to tread underfoot
Something inside us all and each, that stands
Somehow instead of somewhat which commands
'Lie not'? Folk fear to jeopardize their soul,
Stumble at times, walk straight upon the whole,—
That's nature's simple instinct: what may be
The portent here, the influence such as we
Are strangers to?"—

VII.

Exact the thing I call
Man's despot, just the Supernatural
Which, George, was wholly out of—far beyond
Your theory and practice. You had conned
But to reject the precept "To succeed
In gratifying selfishness and greed,
Asseverate such qualities exist
Nowise within yourself! then make acquist
By all means, with no sort of fear!" Alack,
That well-worn lie is obsolete! Fall back
On still a working pretext—"Hearth and Home,
The Altar, love of England, hate of Rome"—
That's serviceable lying—that perchance
Had screened you decently: but 'ware advance
By one step more in perspicacity
Of these our dupes! At length they get to see
As through the earlier, this the latter plea—
And find the greed and selfishness at source!
Ventum est ad triarios: last resource
Should be to what but—exquisite disguise
Disguise-abjuring, truth that looks like lies,
Frankness so sure to meet with unbelief?
Say—you hold in contempt—not them in chief—
But first and foremost your own self! No use
In men but to make sport for you, induce
The puppets now to dance, now stand stock-still,
Now knock their heads together, at your will
For will's sake only—while each plays his part
Submissive: why? through terror at the heart:
"Can it be—this bold man, whose hand we saw
Openly pull the wires, obeys some law
Quite above Man's—nay, God's?" On face fall they.
This was the secret missed, again I say,
Out of your power to grasp conception of,
Much less employ to purpose. Hence the scoff
That greets your very name: folk see but one
Fool more, as well as knave, in Dodington.

WITH FRANCIS FURINI.

[F. Furini, born at Florence 1600, died 1649. A famous painter of the nude, who at the age of forty became a parish priest and a devout liver. He is said to have regretted his undraped pictures.]

I.

NAY, *that*, Furini, never I at least
Mean to believe! What man you were I know,
While you walked Tuscan earth, a painter-priest,
Something about two hundred years ago.
Priest—you did duty punctual as the sun
That rose and set above Saint Sano's church,
Blessing Mugello: of your flock not one
But showed a whiter fleece because of smirch,
Your kind hands wiped it clear from: were they poor?
Bounty broke bread apace,—did marriage lag
For just the want of moneys that ensure
Fit hearth-and-home provision?—straight your bag
Unplumped itself,—reached hearts by way of palms
Goodwill's shake had but tickled. All about
Mugello valley, felt some parish qualms
At worship offered in bare walls without
The comfort of a picture?—prompt such need
Our painter would supply, and throngs to see
Witnessed that goodness—no unholy greed
Of gain—had coaxed from Don Furini—he

Whom princes might in vain implore to toil
For worldly profit—such a masterpiece.
Brief—priest, you poured profuse God's wine and oil
Praiseworthily, I know: shall praising cease
When, priestly vesture put aside, mere man,
You stand for judgment? Rather—what acclaim
—"Good son, good brother, friend in whom we scan
No fault nor flaw"—salutes Furini's name,
The loving as the liberal! Enough:
Only to ope a lily, though for sake
Of setting free its scent, disturbs the rough
Loose gold about its anther. I shall take
No blame in one more blazon, last of all—
Good painter were you: if in very deed
I styled you great—what modern art dares call
My word in question? Let who will take heed
Of what he seeks and misses in your brain
To balance that precision of the brush
Your hand could ply so deftly: all in vain
Strives poet's power for outlet when the push
Is lost upon a barred and bolted gate
Of painter's impotency. Agnolo—
Thine were alike the head and hand, by fate
Doubly endowed! Who boasts head only—woe
To hand's presumption should brush emulate
Fancy's free passage by the pen, and show
Thought wrecked and ruined where the inexpert
Foolhardy fingers half grasped, half let go
Film-wings the poet's pen arrests unhurt!
No—painter such as that miraculous
Michael, who deems you? But the ample gift
Of gracing walls else blank of this our house
Of life with imagery, one bright drift
Poured forth by pencil,—man and woman mere,
Glorified till half owned for gods,—the dear
Fleshly perfection of the human shape,—
This was apportioned you whereby to praise
Heaven and bless earth. Who clumsily essays,
By slighting painter's craft, to prove the ape
Of poet's pen-creation, just betrays
Two-fold ineptitude.

II.

By such sure ways
Do I return, Furini, to my first
And central confidence—that he I proved
Good priest, good man, good painter, and rehearsed
Praise upon praise to show—not simply loved
For virtue, but for wisdom honoured too
Needs must Furini be,—it follows—who
Shall undertake to breed in me belief
That, on his death-bed, weakness played the thief
With wisdom, folly ousted reason quite?
List to the chronicler! With main and might—
So fame runs—did the poor soul beg his friends
To buy and burn his hand-work, make amends
For having reproduced therein—(Ah me!
Sighs fame—that's friend Filippo)—nudity!
Yes, I assure you: he would paint—not men
Merely—a pardonable fault—but when
He had to deal with—oh, not mother Eve
Alone, permissibly in Paradise
Naked and unashamed,—but dared achieve
Dreadful distinction, at soul-safety's price
By also painting women—(why the need?)
Just as God made them: there, you have the truth!
Yes, rosed from top to toe in flush of youth,
One foot upon the moss-fringe, would some Nymph
Try, with its venturous fellow, if the lymph
Were chillier than the slab-stepped fountain-edge;
The while a-heap her garments on its ledge
Of boulder lay within hand's easy reach,
—No one least kid-skin cast around her! Speech
Shrinks from enumerating case and case
Of—were it but Diana at the chase,
With tunic tucked discreetly hunting-high!
No, some Queen Venus set our necks awry,
Turned faces from the painter's all-too-frank
Triumph of flesh! For—whom had he to thank

—This self-appointed nature-student? Whence
Picked he up practice? By what evidence
Did he unhandsomely become adept
In simulating bodies? How except
By actual sight of such? Himself confessed
The enormity: quoth Philip "When I pressed
The painter to acknowledge his abuse
Of artistry else potent—what excuse
Made the infatuated man? I give
His very words: 'Did you but know, as I,
—O scruple-splitting sickly-sensitive
Mild-moral-monger, what the agony
Of Art is ere Art satisfy herself
In imitating Nature—(Man, poor elf,
Striving to match the finger-mark of Him
The immeasurably matchless)—gay or grim,
Pray, would your smile be? Leave mere fools to tax
Art's high-strung brain's intentness as so lax
That, in its mid-throe, idle fancy sees
The moment for admittance!' Pleadings these—
Specious, I grant." So adds, and seems to wince
Somewhat, our censor—but shall truth convince
Blockheads like Baldinucci?[1]

III.

I resume
My incredulity: your other kind
Of soul, Furini, never was so blind,
Even through death-mist, as to grope in gloom
For cheer beside a bonfire piled to turn
Ashes and dust all that your noble life
Did homage to life's Lord by,—bid them burn
—These Baldinucci blockheads — pictures rife
With record, in each rendered loveliness,
That one appreciative creature's debt
Of thanks to the Creator more or less,
Was paid according as heart's-will had met
Hand's-power in Art's endeavour to express
Heaven's most consummate of achievements, bless
Earth by a semblance of the seal God set
On woman his supremest work. I trust
Rather, Furini, dying breath had vent
In some fine fervour of thanksgiving just
For this—that soul and body's power you spent—
Agonized to adumbrate, trace in dust
That marvel which we dream the firmament
Copies in star-device when fancies stray
Outlining, orb by orb, Andromeda—
God's best of beauteous and magnificent
Revealed to earth—the naked female form.
Nay, I mistake not: wrath that's but lukewarm
Would boil indeed were such a critic styled
Himself an artist: artist! Ossa piled
Topping Olympus—the absurd which crowns
The extravagant—whereat one laughs, not frowns.
Paints he? One bids the poor pretender take
His sorry self, a trouble and disgrace,
From out the sacred presence, void the place
Artists claim only. What—not merely wake
Our pity that suppressed concupiscence—
A satyr masked as matron—makes pretence
To the coarse blue-fly's instinct—can perceive
No better reason why she should exist—
—God's lily-limbed and blush-rose-bosomed Eve—
Than as a hot-bed for the sensualist
To fly-blow with his fancies, make pure stuff
Breed him back filth—this were not crime enough?
But further—fly to style itself—nay, more—
To steal among the sacred ones, crouch down
Though but to where their garments sweep the floor—
—Still catching some faint sparkle from the crown
Crowning transcendent Michael, Leonard,
Rafael,—to sit beside the feet of such,
Unspurned because unnoticed, then reward
Their toleration—mercy overmuch—

[1] Author of a history of Art, and a friend of Furini's.

By stealing from the throne-step to the fools
Curious outside the gateway, all-agape
To learn by what procedure, in the schools
Of Art, a merest man in outward shape
May learn to be Correggio! Old and young,
These learners got their lesson: Art was just
A safety-screen — (Art, which Correggio's tongue
Calls "Virtue")—for a skulking vice: mere lust
Inspired the artist when his Night and Morn
Slept and awoke in marble on that edge
Of heaven above our awestruck earth: lust-born
His Eve low bending took the privilege
Of life from what our eyes saw—God's own palm
That put the flame forth—to the love and thanks
Of all creation save this recreant!

IV.

Calm
Our phrase, Furini! Not the artist-ranks
Claim riddance of an interloper: no—
This Baldinucci did but grunt and sniff
Outside Art's pale—ay, grubbed, where pine-trees grow,
For pignuts only.

V.

You the Sacred! If
Indeed on you has been bestowed the dower
Of Art in fulness, graced with head and hand,
Head—to look up not downwards, hand—of power
To make head's gain the portion of a world
Where else the uninstructed ones too sure
Would take all outside beauty—film that's furled
About a star—for the star's self, endure
No guidance to the central glory,—nay,
(Sadder) might apprehend the film was fog,
Or (worst) wish all but vapour well away,
And sky's pure product thickened from earth's bog—
Since so, nor seldom, have your worthiest failed
To trust their own soul's insight—why? except
For warning that the head of the adept
May too much prize the hand, work unassailed
By scruple of the better sense that finds
An orb within each halo, bids gross flesh
Free the fine spirit-pattern, nor enmesh
More than is meet a marvel custom blinds
Only the vulgar eye to. Now, less fear
That you, the foremost of Art's fellowship,
Will oft—will ever so offend! But—hip
And thigh—smite the Philistine! *You*—slunk here—
Connived at, by too easy tolerance,
Not to scrape palette simply or squeeze brush,
But dub your very self an Artist? Tush—
You, of the daubings, is it, dare advance
This doctrine that the Artist-mind must needs
Own to affinity with yours—confess
Provocative acquaintance, more or less,
With each impurely-peevish worm that breeds
Inside your brain's receptacle?

VI.

Enough.
Who owns "I dare not look on diadems
Without an itch to pick out, purloin gems
Others contentedly leave sparkling"—gruff
Answers the guard of the regalia: "Why—
Consciously kleptomaniac—thrust yourself
Where your illicit craving after pelf
Is tempted most—in the King's treasury?
Go elsewhere! Sort with thieves, if thus you feel—
When folk clean-handed simply recognize
Treasure whereof the mere sight satisfies—
But straight your fingers are on itch to steal!
Hence with you!"

Pray, Furini!

VII.

"Bounteous God,
Deviser and Dispenser of all gifts
To soul through sense,—in Art the soul uplifts
Man's best of thanks! What but Thy measuring-rod
Meted forth heaven and earth? more intimate,
Thy very hands were busied with the task
Of making, in this human shape, a mask—
A match for that divine. Shall love abate

Man's wonder? Nowise! True—true—all too true—
No gift but, in the very plenitude
Of its perfection, goes maimed, misconstrued
By wickedness or weakness: still, some few
Have grace to see Thy purpose, strength to mar
Thy work by no admixture of their own,
—Limn truth not falsehood, bid us love alone
The type untampered with, the naked star!"

VIII.

And, prayer done, painter—what if you should preach?
Not as of old when playing pulpiteer
To simple-witted country folk, but here
In actual London try your powers of speech
On us the cultured, therefore sceptical—
What would you? For, suppose he has his word
In faith's behalf, no matter how absurd,
This painter-theologian? One and all
We lend an ear—nay, Science takes thereto—
Encourages the meanest who has racked
Nature until he gains from her some fact,
To state what truth is from his point of view,
Mere pin-point though it be: since many such
Conduce to make a whole, she bids our friend
Come forward unabashed and haply lend
His little life-experience to our much
Of modern knowledge. Since she so insists,
Up stands Furini.

IX.

"Evolutionists!
At truth I glimpse from depths, you glance from heights,
Our stations for discovery opposites,—
How should ensue agreement? I explain:
'Tis the tip-top of things to which you strain
Your vision, until atoms, protoplasm,
And what and whence and how may be the spasm
Which sets all going, stop you: down perforce
Needs must your observation take its course,
Since there's no moving upwards: link by link
You drop to where the atoms somehow think,
Feel, know themselves to be: the world's begun,
Such as we recognize it. Have you done
Descending? Here's ourself,—Man, known to-day,
Duly evolved at last,—so far, you say,
The sum and seal of being's progress. Good!
Thus much at least is clearly understood—
Of power does Man possess no particle:
Of knowledge—just so much as shows that still
It ends in ignorance on every side:
But righteousness—ah, Man is deified
Thereby, for compensation! Make survey
Of Man's surroundings, try creation—nay,
Try emulation of the minimized
Minuteness fancy may conceive! Surprised
Reason becomes by two defeats for one—
Not only power at each phenomenon
Baffled, but knowledge also in default—
Asking what *is* minuteness—yonder vault
Speckled with suns, or this the millionth—thing,
How shall I call?—that on some insect's wing
Helps to make out in dyes the mimic star?
Weak, ignorant, accordingly we are:
What then? The worst for Nature! Where began
Righteousness, moral sense except in Man?
True, he makes nothing, understands no whit:
Had the initiator-spasm seen fit
Thus doubly to endow him, none the worse
And much the better were the universe.
What does Man see or feel or apprehend
Here, there, and everywhere, but faults to mend,
Omissions to supply,—one wide disease
Of things that are, which Man at once would ease
Had will but power and knowledge? failing both—
Things must take will for deed—Man, nowise loth,
Accepts pre-eminency: mere blind force—
Mere knowledge undirected in its course
By any care for what is made or marred
In either's operation—*these* award
The crown to? Rather let it deck thy brows,
Man, whom alone a righteousness endows

Would cure the wide world's ailing! Who disputes
Thy claim thereto? Had Spasm more attributes
Than power and knowledge in its gift, before
Man came to pass? The higher that we soar,
The less of moral sense like Man's we find:
No sign of such before,—what comes behind,
Who guesses? But until there crown our sight
The quite new—not the old mere infinite
Of changings,—some fresh kind of sun and moon,—
Then, not before, shall I expect a boon
Of intuition just as strange, which turns
Evil to good, and wrong to right, unlearns
All Man's experience learned since Man was he.
Accept in Man, advanced to this degree,
The Prime Mind, therefore! neither wise nor strong—
Whose fault? but were he both, then right, not wrong
As now, throughout the world were paramount
According to his will,—which I account
The qualifying faculty. He stands
Confessed supreme — the monarch whose commands
Could he enforce, how bettered were the world!
He's at the height this moment—to be hurled
Next moment to the bottom by rebound
Of his own peal of laughter. All around
Ignorance wraps him,—whence and how and why
Things are,—yet cloud breaks and lets blink the sky
Just overhead, not elsewhere! What assures
His optics that the very blue which lures
Comes not of black outside it, doubly dense?
Ignorance overwraps his moral sense,
Winds him about, relaxing, as it wraps,
So much and no more than lets through perhaps
The murmured knowledge — 'Ignorance exists.'

x.

"I at the bottom, Evolutionists,
Advise beginning, rather. I profess
To know just one fact—my self-consciousness,—
'Twixt ignorance and ignorance enisled,—
Knowledge: before me was my Cause—that's styled
God: after, in due course succeeds the rest,—
All that my knowledge comprehends — at best—
At worst, conceives about in mild despair.
Light needs must touch on either darkness: where?
Knowledge so far impinges on the Cause
Before me, that I know—by certain laws
Wholly unknown, whate'er I apprehend
Within, without me, had its rise: thus blend
I, and all things perceived, in one Effect.
How far can knowledge any ray project
On what comes after me—the universe?
Well, my attempt to make the cloud disperse
Begins—not from above but underneath:
I climb, you soar,—who soars soon loses breath
And sinks, who climbs keeps one foot firm on fact
Ere hazarding the next step: soul's first act
(Call consciousness the soul—some name we need)
Getting itself aware, through stuff decreed
Thereto (so call the body)—who has stept
So far, there let him stand, become adept
In body ere he shift his station thence
One single hair's breadth. Do I make pretence
To teach, myself unskilled in learning? Lo,
My life's work! Let my pictures prove I know
Somewhat of what this fleshly frame of ours
Or is or should be, how the soul empowers
The body to reveal its every mood
Of love and hate, pour forth its plenitude
Of passion. If my hand attained to give
Thus permanence to truth else fugitive,
Did not I also fix each fleeting grace
Of form and feature—save the beauteous face—
Arrest decay in transitory might

Of bone and muscle—cause the world to bless
For ever each transcendent nakedness
Of man and woman? Were such feats achieved
By sloth, or strenuous labour unrelieved,
—Yet lavished vainly? Ask that underground
(So may I speak) of all on surface found
Of flesh-perfection! Depths on depths to probe
Of all-inventive artifice, disrobe
Marvel at hiding under marvel, pluck
Veil after veil from Nature—were the luck
Ours to surprise the secret men so name,
That still eludes the searcher—all the same,
Repays his search with still fresh proof—'Externe,
Not inmost, is the Cause, fool! Look and learn!'
Thus teach my hundred pictures: firm and fast
There did I plant my first foot. And the next?
Nowhere! 'Twas put forth and withdrawn, perplexed
At touch of what seemed stable and proved stuff
Such as the coloured clouds are: plain enough
There lay the outside universe: try Man—
My most immediate! and the dip began
From safe and solid into that profound
Of ignorance I tell you surges round
My rock-spit of self-knowledge. Well and ill,
Evil and good irreconcilable
Above, beneath, about my every side,—
How did this wild confusion far and wide
Tally with my experience when my stamp—
So far from stirring—struck out, each a lamp,
Spark after spark of truth from where I stood—
Pedestalled triumph? Evil there was good,
Want was the promise of supply, defect
Ensured completion,—where and when and how?
Leave that to the First Cause! Enough that now,
Here where I stand, this moment's me and mine,
Shows me what is, permits me to divine
What shall be. Wherefore? Nay, how otherwise?
Look at my pictures! What so glorifies
The body that the permeating soul
Finds there no particle elude control
Direct, or fail of duty,—most obscure
When most subservient? Did that Cause ensure
The soul such raptures as its fancy stings
Body to furnish when, uplift by wings
Of passion, here and now, it leaves the earth,
Loses itself above, where bliss has birth—
(Heaven, be the phrase)—did that same Cause contrive
Such solace for the body, soul must dive
At drop of fancy's pinion, condescend
To bury both alike on earth, our friend
And fellow, where minutely exquisite
Low lie the pleasures, now and here—no herb
But hides its marvel, peace no doubts perturb
In each small mystery of insect life—
—Shall the soul's Cause thus gift the soul, yet strife
Continue still of fears with hopes,—for why?
What if the Cause, whereof we now descry
So far the wonder-working, lack at last
Will, power, benevolence—a protoplast,
No consummator, sealing up the sum
Of all things,—past and present and to come
Perfection? No, I have no doubt at all!
There's my amount of knowledge—great or small,
Sufficient for my needs: for see! advance
Its light now on that depth of ignorance
I shrank before from—yonder where the world
Lies wreck-strewn,—evil towering, prone good—hurled
From pride of place, on every side. For me
(Patience, beseech you!) knowledge can but be
Of good by knowledge of good's opposite—
Evil,—since, to distinguish wrong from right,
Both must be known in each extreme, beside—
(Or what means knowledge—to aspire or bide
Content with half-attaining? Hardly so!)
Made to know on, know ever, I must know
All to be known at any halting-stage
Of my soul's progress, such as earth, where wage
War, just for soul's instruction, pain with joy,
Folly with wisdom, all that works annoy

With all that quiets and contents,—in brief,
Good strives with evil.

"Now then for relief,
Friends, of your patience kindly curbed so long.
'What?' snarl you, 'Is the fool's conceit thus strong—
Must the whole outside world in soul and sense
Suffer, that he grow sage at its expense?'
By no means! 'Tis by merest touch of toe
I try—not trench on—ignorance, just know—
And so keep steady footing: how you fare,
Caught in the whirlpool—that's the Cause's care,
Strong, wise, good,—this I know at any rate
In my own self,—but how may operate
With you—strength, wisdom, goodness—no least blink
Of knowledge breaks the darkness round me. Think!
Could I see plain, be somehow certified
All was illusion,—evil far and wide
Was good disguised,—why, out with one huge wipe
Goes knowledge from me. Type needs anti-type:
As night needs day, as shine needs shade, so good
Needs evil: how were pity understood
Unless by pain? Make evident that pain
Permissibly masks pleasure—you abstain
From outstretch of the finger-tip that saves
A drowning fly. Who proffers help of hand
To weak Andromeda exposed on strand
At mercy of the monster? Were all true,
Help were not wanting: 'But 'tis false,' cry you,
'Mere fancy-work of paint and brush!' No less,
Were mine the skill, the magic, to impress
Beholders with a confidence they saw
Life,—veritable flesh and blood in awe
Of just as true a sea-beast,—would they stare
Simply as now, or cry out, curse and swear,
Or call the gods to help, or catch up stick
And stone, according as their hearts were quick
Or sluggish? Well, some old artificer
Could do as much,—at least, so books aver,—
Able to make-believe, while I, poor wight,
Make-fancy, nothing more. Though wrong were right,
Could we but know—still wrong must needs seem wrong
To do right's service, prove men weak or strong,
Choosers of evil or of good. 'No such
Illusion possible!' Ah, friends, you touch
Just here my solid standing-place amid
The wash and welter, whence all doubts are bid
Back to the ledge they break against in foam,
Futility: my soul, and my soul's home
This body,—how each operates on each,
And how things outside, fact or feigning, teach
What good is and what evil,—just the same,
Be feigning or be fact the teacher,—blame
Diffidence nowise if, from this I judge
My point of vantage, not an inch I budge.
All—for myself—seems ordered wise and well
Inside it,—what reigns outside, who can tell?
Contrariwise, who needs be told 'The space
Which yields thee knowledge,—do its bounds embrace
Well-willing and wise-working, each at height?
Enough: beyond thee lies the infinite—
Back to thy circumscription!'

"Back indeed!
Ending where I began—thus: retrocede,
Who will,—what comes first, take first, I advise!
Acquaint you with the body ere your eyes
Look upward: this Andromeda of mine—
Gaze on the beauty, Art hangs out for sign
There's finer entertainment underneath.
Learn how they ministrate to life and death—
Those incommensurably marvellous
Contrivances which furnish forth the house
Where soul has sway! Though Master keep aloof,
Signs of His presence multiply from roof

To basement of the building. Look around,
Learn thoroughly,—no fear that you confound
Master with messuage! He's away, no doubt,
But what if, all at once, you come upon
A startling proof—not that the Master gone
Was present lately—but that something—whence
Light comes—has pushed Him into residence?
Was such the symbol's meaning,—old, uncouth—
That circle of the serpent, tail in mouth?
Only by looking low, ere looking high,
Comes penetration of the mystery."

XI.

Thanks! After sermonizing, psalmody!
Now praise with pencil, Painter! Fools attaint
Your fame, forsooth, because its power inclines
To livelier colours, more attractive lines
Than suit some orthodox sad sickly saint
—Grey male emaciation, haply streaked
Carmine by scourgings—or they want, far worse—
Some self-scathed woman, framed to bless not curse
Nature that loved the form whereon hate wreaked
The wrongs you see. No, rather paint some full
Benignancy, the first and foremost boon
Of youth, health, strength,—show beauty's May, ere June
Undo the bud's blush, leave a rose to cull
—No poppy, neither! yet less perfect-pure,
Divinely-precious with life's dew besprent.
Show saintliness that's simply innocent
Of guessing sinnership exists to cure
All in good time! In time let age advance
And teach that knowledge helps—not ignorance—
The healing of the nations. Let my spark
Quicken your tinder! Burn with—Joan of Arc!
Not at the end, nor midway when there grew
The brave delusions, when rare fancies flew
Before the eyes, and in the ears of her
Strange voices woke imperiously astir:
No,—paint the peasant girl all peasant-like,
Spirit and flesh—the hour about to strike
When this should be transfigured, that inflamed,
By heart's admonishing "Thy country shamed,
Thy king shut out of all his realm except
One sorry corner!" and to life forth leapt
The indubitable lightning "Can there be
Country and king's salvation—all through me?"
Memorize that burst's moment, Francis! Tush—
None of the nonsense-writing! Fitlier brush
Shall clear off fancy's film-work and let show
Not what the foolish feign but the wise know—
Ask Sainte-Beuve[1] else!—or better, Quicherat,[2]
The downright-digger into truth that's—Bah,
Bettered by fiction? Well, of fact thus much
Concerns you, that "of prudishness no touch
From first to last defaced the maid; anon,
Camp-use compelling"—what says D'Alençon
Her fast friend?—"though I saw while she undressed
How fair she was—especially her breast—
Never had I a wild thought!"—as indeed
I nowise doubt. Much less would she take heed—
When eve came, and the lake, the hills around
Were all one solitude and silence,—found
Barriered impenetrably safe about,—
Take heed of interloping eyes shut out,
But quietly permit the air imbibe
Her naked beauty till . . . but hear the scribe!
Now as she fain would bathe, one even-tide,
God's maid, this Joan,[3] *from the pool's edge she spied*
The fair blue bird clowns call the Fisher-king:
And "'Las," sighed she, "my Liege is such a thing

[1] The famous French critic and *causeur*.
[2] A great authority on Joan of Arc.
[3] Mr. Browning's son has painted a picture of Joan bathing.

As thou, lord but of one poor lonely place
Out of his whole wide France: were mine the grace
To set my Dauphin free as thou, blue bird!"
Properly Martin-fisher—that's the word,
Not yours nor mine: folk said the rustic oath
In common use with her was—"By my troth"?
No,—"By my Martin"! Paint this! Only, turn
Her face away—that face about to burn
Into an angel's when the time is ripe!
That task's beyond you. Finished, Francis? Wipe
Pencil, scrape palette, and retire content!
"*Omnia non omnibus*"—no harm is meant!

WITH GERARD DE LAIRESSE.

[Gerard de Lairesse was a Flemish painter, born at Liège in 1640; he died in 1711. He was a famous figure in his day, extravagant and dissipated. He painted rapidly, and was fond of the violin. He was supposed to be the author of a treatise on Painting which bears his name, but some doubt this.]

I.

Ah, but—because you were struck blind, could bless
Your sense no longer with the actual view
Of man and woman, those fair forms you drew
In happier days so duteously and true,—
Must I account my Gerard de Lairesse
All sorrow-smitten? He was hindered too
—Was this no hardship?—from producing, plain
To us who still have eyes, the pageantry
Which passed and passed before his busy brain
And, captured on his canvas, showed our sky
Traversed by flying shapes, earth stocked with brood
Of monsters,—centaurs bestial, satyrs lewd,—
Not without much Olympian glory, shapes
Of god and goddess in their gay escapes
From the severe serene: or haply paced
The antique ways, god-counselled, nymph-embraced,
Some early human kingly personage.
Such wonders of the teeming poet's-age
Were still to be: nay, these indeed began—
Are not the pictures extant?—till the ban
Of blindness struck both palette from his thumb
And pencil from his finger.

II.

Blind—not dumb,
Else, Gerard, were my inmost bowels stirred
With pity beyond pity: no, the word
Was left upon your unmolested lips:
Your mouth unsealed, despite of eyes' eclipse,
Talked all brain's yearning into birth. I lack
Somehow the heart to wish your practice back
Which boasted hand's achievement in a score
Of veritable pictures, less or more,
Still to be seen: myself have seen them,—moved
To pay due homage to the man I loved
Because of that prodigious book he wrote
On Artistry's Ideal, by taking note,
Making acquaintance with his artist-work.
So my youth's piety obtained success
Of all-too dubious sort: for, though it irk
To tell the issue, few or none would guess
From extant lines and colours, De Lairesse,
Your faculty, although each deftly-grouped
And aptly-ordered figure-piece was judged
Worthy a prince's purchase in its day.
Bearded experience bears not to be duped
Like boyish fancy: 'twas a boy that budged
No foot's breadth from your visioned steps away
The while that memorable "Walk" he trudged
In your companionship,—the Book must say
Where, when and whither,—"Walk," come what come may,
No measurer of steps on this our globe
Shall ever match for marvels. Faustus' robe,
And Fortunatus' cap were gifts of price:
But—oh, your piece of sober sound advice
That artists should descry abundant worth
In trivial commonplace, nor groan at dearth

If fortune bade the painter's craft be plied
In vulgar town and country! Why despond
Because hemmed round by Dutch canals? Beyond
The ugly actual, lo, on every side
Imagination's limitless domain
Displayed a wealth of wondrous sounds and sights
Ripe to be realized by poet's brain
Acting on painter's brush! "Ye doubt? Poor wights,
What if I set example, go before,
While you come after, and we both explore
Holland turned Dreamland, taking care to note
Objects whereto my pupils may devote
Attention with advantage?"

III.

So commenced
That "Walk" amid true wonders—none to you,
But huge to us ignobly common-sensed,
Purblind, while plain could proper optics view
In that old sepulchre by lightning split,
Whereof the lid bore carven,—any dolt
Imagines why,—Jove's very thunderbolt:
You who could straight perceive, by glance at it,
This tomb must needs be Phaeton's! In a trice,
Confirming that conjecture, close on hand,
Behold, half out, half in the ploughed-up sand,
A chariot-wheel explained its bolt-device:
What other than the Chariot of the Sun
Ever let drop the like? Consult the tome—[1]
I bid inglorious tarriers-at-home—
For greater still surprise the while that "Walk"
Went on and on, to end as it begun,
Choke-full of chances, changes, every one
No whit less wondrous. What was there to baulk
Us, who had eyes, from seeing? You with none
Missed not a marvel: wherefore? Let us talk.

[1] *The Art of Painting, etc.*, by Gerard de Lairesse. Translated by J. F. Fritsch, 1778.

IV.

Say am I right? Your sealed sense moved your mind,
Free from obstruction, to compassionate
Art's power left powerless, and supply the blind
With fancies worth all facts denied by fate.
Mind could invent things, and to—take away,
At pleasure, leave out trifles mean and base
Which vex the sight that cannot say them nay
But, where mind plays the master, have no place.
And bent on banishing was mind, be sure,
All except beauty from its mustered tribe
Of objects apparitional which lure
Painter to show and poet to describe—
That imagery of the antique song
Truer than truth's self. Fancy's rainbow-birth
Conceived mid clouds in Greece, could glance along
Your passage o'er Dutch veritable earth,
As with ourselves, who see, familiar throng
About our pacings men and women worth
Nowise a glance—so poets apprehend—
Since nought avails portraying them in verse:
While painters turn upon the heel, intend
To spare their work the critic's ready curse
Due to the daily and undignified.

V.

I who myself contentedly abide
Awake, nor want the wings of dream,—who tramp
Earth's common surface, rough, smooth, dry or damp,
—I understand alternatives, no less
—Conceive your soul's leap, Gerard de Lairesse!
How were it could I mingle false with true,
Boast, with the sights I see, your vision too?
Advantage would it prove or detriment
If I saw double? Could I gaze intent
On Dryope plucking the blossoms red,
As you, whereat her lote-tree writhed and bled,
Yet lose no gain, no hard fast wide-awake
Having and holding nature for the sake
Of nature only—nymph and lote-tree thus
Gained by the loss of fruit not fabulous,

Apple of English homesteads, where I see
Nor seek more than crisp buds a struggling bee
Uncrumples, caught by sweet he clambers through?
Truly, a moot point: make it plain to me,
Who, bee-like, sate sense with the simply true,
Nor seek to heighten that sufficiency
By help of feignings proper to the page—
Earth's surface-blank whereon the elder age
Put colour, poetizing—poured rich life
On what were else a dead ground—nothingness—
Until the solitary world grew rife
With Joves and Junos, nymphs and satyrs. Yes,
The reason was, fancy composed the strife
'Twixt sense and soul: for sense, my De Lairesse,
Cannot content itself with outward things,
Mere beauty: soul must needs know whence there springs—
How, when and why—what sense but loves, nor lists
To know at all.

VI.

Not one of man's acquists
Ought he resignedly to lose, methinks:
So, point me out which was it of the links
Snapt first, from out the chain which used to bind
Our earth to heaven, and yet for you, since blind,
Subsisted still efficient and intact?
Oh, we can fancy too! but somehow fact
Has got to—say, not so much push aside
Fancy, as to declare its place supplied
By fact unseen but no less fact the same,
Which mind bids sense accept. Is mind to blame,
Or sense,—does that usurp, this abdicate?
First of all, as you "walked"—were it too late
For us to walk, if so we willed? Confess
We have the sober feet still, De Lairesse!
Why not the freakish brain too, that must needs
Supplement nature—not see flowers and weeds
Simply as such, but link with each and all
The ultimate perfection—what we call
Rightly enough the human shape divine?
The rose? No rose unless it disentwine
From Venus' wreath the while she bends to kiss
Her deathly love?

VII.

Plain retrogression, this!
No, no: we poets go not back at all:
What you did we could do—from great to small
Sinking assuredly: if this world last
One moment longer when Man finds its Past
Exceed its Present—blame the Protoplast!
If we no longer see as you of old,
'Tis we see deeper. Progress for the bold!
You saw the body, 'tis the soul we see.
Try now! Bear witness while you walk with me,
I see as you: if we loose arms, stop pace,
'Tis that you stand still, I conclude the race
Without your company. Come, walk once more
The "Walk": if I to-day as you of yore
See just like you the blind—then sight shall cry
—The whole long day quite gone through—victory!

VIII.

Thunders on thunders, doubling and redoubling
Doom o'er the mountain, while a sharp white fire
Now shone, now sheared its rusty herbage, troubling
Hardly the fir-boles, now discharged its ire
Full where some pine-tree's solitary spire
Crashed down, defiant to the last: till—lo,
The motive of the malice!—all a-glow,
Circled with flame there yawned a sudden rift
I' the rock-face, and I saw a form erect
Front and defy the outrage, while—as checked,
Chidden, beside him dauntless in the drift—
Cowered a heaped creature, wing and wing outspread
In deprecation o'er the crouching head
Still hungry for the feast foregone awhile.
O thou, of scorn's unconquerable smile,

Was it when this—Jove's feathered fury—slipped
Gore-glutted from the heart's core whence he ripped—
This eagle-hound — neither reproach nor prayer—
Baffled, in one more fierce attempt to tear
Fate's secret from thy safeguard,—was it then
That all these thunders rent earth, ruined air
To reach thee, pay thy patronage of men?
He thundered,—to withdraw, as beast to lair,
Before the triumph on thy pallid brow.
Gather the night again about thee now,
Hate on, love ever! Morn is breaking there—
The granite ridge pricks through the mist, turns gold
As wrong turns right. O laughters manifold
Of ocean's ripple at dull earth's despair!

IX.

But morning's laugh sets all the crags alight
Above the baffled tempest: tree and tree
Stir themselves from the stupor of the night,
And every strangled branch resumes its right
To breathe, shakes loose dark's clinging dregs, waves free
In dripping glory. Prone the runnels plunge,
While earth, distent with moisture like a sponge,
Smokes up, and leaves each plant its gem to see,
Each grass-blade's glory-glitter. Had I known
The torrent now turned river?—masterful
Making its rush o'er tumbled ravage—stone
And stub which barred the froths and foams: no bull
Ever broke bounds in formidable sport
More overwhelmingly, till lo, the spasm
Sets him to dare that last mad leap: report
Who may—his fortunes in the deathly chasm
That swallows him in silence! Rather turn
Whither, upon the upland, pedestalled
Into the broad day-splendour, whom discern
These eyes but thee, supreme one, rightly called
Moon-maid in heaven above and, here below,
Earth's huntress-queen? I note the garb succinct
Saving from smirch that purity of snow
From breast to knee—snow's self with just the tinct
Of the apple-blossom's heart-blush. Ah, the bow
Slack-strung her fingers grasp, where, ivory-linked
Horn curving blends with horn, a moonlike pair
Which mimic the brow's crescent sparkling so—
As if a star's live restless fragment winked
Proud yet repugnant, captive in such hair!
What hope along the hillside, what far bliss
Lets the crisp hair-plaits fall so low they kiss
Those lucid shoulders? Must a morn so blithe,
Needs have its sorrow when the twang and hiss
Tell that from out thy sheaf one shaft makes writhe
Its victim, thou unerring Artemis?
Why did the chamois stand so fair a mark
Arrested by the novel shape he dreamed
Was bred of liquid marble in the dark
Depths of the mountain's womb which ever teemed
With novel births of wonder? Not one spark
Of pity in that steel-grey glance which gleamed
At the poor hoof's protesting as it stamped
Idly the granite? Let me glide unseen
From thy proud presence: well mayst thou be queen
Of all those strange and sudden deaths which damped
So oft Love's torch and Hymen's taper lit
For happy marriage till the maidens paled
And perished on the temple-step, assailed
By—what except to envy must man's wit
Impute that sure implacable release
Of life from warmth and joy? But death means peace.

X.

Noon is the conqueror,—not a spray, nor leaf,
Nor herb, nor blossom but has rendered up
Its morning dew: the valley seemed one cup
Of cloud-smoke, but the vapour's reign was brief,

Sun-smitten, see, it hangs—the filmy haze—
Grey-garmenting the herbless mountain-side,
To soothe the day's sharp glare: while far and wide
Above unclouded burns the sky, one blaze
With fierce immitigable blue, no bird
Ventures to spot by passage. E'en of peaks
Which still presume there, plain each pale point speaks
In wan transparency of waste incurred
By over-daring: far from me be such!
Deep in the hollow, rather, where combine
Tree, shrub and briar to roof with shade and cool
The remnant of some lily-strangled pool,
Edged round with mossy fringing soft and fine.
Smooth lie the bottom slabs, and overhead
Watch elder, bramble, rose, and service-tree
And one beneficent rich barberry
Jewelled all over with fruit-pendents red.
What have I seen! O Satyr, well I know
How sad thy case, and what a world of woe
Was hid by the brown visage furry-framed
Only for mirth: who otherwise could think—
Marking thy mouth gape still on laughter's brink,
Thine eyes a-swim with merriment unnamed
But haply guessed at by their furtive wink?
And all the while a heart was panting sick
Behind that shaggy bulwark of thy breast—
Passion it was that made those breath-bursts thick
I took for mirth subsiding into rest.
So, it was Lyda—she of all the train
Of forest-thridding nymphs,—'twas only she
Turned from thy rustic homage in disdain,
Saw but that poor uncouth outside of thee,
And, from her circling sisters, mocked a pain
Echo had pitied—whom Pan loved in vain—
For she was wishful to partake thy glee,
Mimic thy mirth—who loved her not again,
Savage for Lyda's sake. She crouches there—
Thy cruel beauty, slumberously laid
Supine on heaped-up beast-skins, unaware
Thy steps have traced her to the briery glade,
Thy greedy hands disclose the cradling lair,
Thy hot eyes reach and revel on the maid!

XI.

Now, what should this be for? The sun's decline
Seems as he lingered lest he lose some act
Dread and decisive, some prodigious fact
Like thunder from the safe sky's sapphirine
About to alter earth's conditions, packed
With fate for nature's self that waits, aware
What mischief unsuspected in the air
Menaces momently a cataract.
Therefore it is that yonder space extends
Untrenched upon by any vagrant tree,
Shrub, weed well nigh; they keep their bounds, leave free
The platform for what actors? Foes or friends,
Here come they trooping silent: heaven suspends
Purpose the while they range themselves. I see!
Bent on a battle, two vast powers agree
This present and no after-contest ends
One or the other's grasp at rule in reach
Over the race of man—host fronting host,
As statue statue fronts—wrath-molten each,
Solidified by hate,—earth halved almost,
To close once more in chaos. Yet two shapes
Show prominent, each from the universe
Of minions round about him, that disperse
Like cloud-obstruction when a bolt escapes.
Who flames first? Macedonian is it thou?
Ay, and who fronts thee, King Darius, drapes
His form with purple, fillet-folds his brow.

XII.

What, then the long day dies at last? Abrupt
The sun that seemed, in stooping, sure to melt
Our mountain ridge, is mastered: black the belt
Of westward crags, his gold could not corrupt,
Barriers again the valley, lets the flow
Of lavish glory waste itself away
—Whither? For new climes, fresh eyes breaks the day!
Night was not to be baffled. If the glow

Were all that's gone from us! Did clouds, afloat
So filmily but now, discard no rose,
Sombre throughout the fleeciness that grows
A sullen uniformity. I note
Rather displeasure,—in the overspread
Change from the swim of gold to one pale lead
Oppressive to malevolence,—than late
Those amorous yearnings when the aggregate
Of cloudlets pressed that each and all might sate
Its passion and partake in relies red
Of day's bequeathment: now, a frown instead
Estranges, and affrights who needs must fare
On and on till his journey ends: but where?
Caucasus? Lost now in the night. Away
And far enough lies that Arcadia.
The human heroes tread the world's dark way
No longer. Yet I dimly see almost—
Yes, for my last adventure! 'Tis a ghost.
So drops away the beauty! There he stands
Voiceless, scarce strives with deprecating hands.

XIII.

Enough! Stop further fooling, De Lairesse!
My fault, not yours! Some fitter way express
Heart's satisfaction that the Past indeed
Is past, gives way before Life's best and last,
The all-including Future! What were life
Did soul stand still therein, forego her strife
Through the ambiguous Present to the goal
Of some all-reconciling Future? Soul,
Nothing has been which shall not bettered be
Hereafter,—leave the root, by law's decree
Whence springs the ultimate and perfect tree!
Busy thee with unearthing root? Nay, climb—
Quit trunk, branch, leaf and flower—reach, rest sublime
Where fruitage ripens in the blaze of day!
O'erlook, despise, forget, throw flower away,
Intent on progress? No whit more than stop
Ascent therewith to dally, screen the top
Sufficiency of yield by interposed
Twistwork bold foot gets free from. Wherefore glozed
The poets—"Dream afresh old godlike shapes,
Recapture ancient fable that escapes,
Push back reality, repeople earth
With vanished falseness, recognize no worth
In fact new-born unless 'tis rendered back
Pallid by fancy, as the western rack
Of fading cloud bequeaths the lake some gleam
Of its gone glory!"

XIV.

Let things be—not seem,
I counsel rather,—do, and nowise dream!
Earth's young significance is all to learn:
The dead Greek lore lies buried in the urn
Where who seeks fire finds ashes. Ghost, forsooth!
What was the best Greece babbled of as truth?
"A shade, a wretched nothing,—sad, thin, drear,
Cold, dark, it holds on to the lost loves here,
If hand have haply sprinkled o'er the dead
Three charitable dust-heaps, made mouth red
One moment by the sip of sacrifice:
Just so much comfort thaws the stubborn ice
Slow-thickening upward till it choke at length
The last faint flutter craving—not for strength,
Not beauty, not the riches and the rule
O'er men that made life life indeed." Sad school
Was Hades! Gladly,—might the dead but slink
To life back,—to the dregs once more would drink
Each interloper, drain the humblest cup
Fate mixes for humanity.

XV.

Cheer up,—
Be death with me, as with Achilles erst,
Of Man's calamities the last and worst:
Take it so! By proved potency that still
Makes perfect, be assured, come what come will,
What once lives never dies — what here attains
To a beginning, has no end, still gains

And never loses aught: when, where, and how—
Lies in Law's lap. What's death then? Even now
With so much knowledge is it hard to bear
Brief interposing ignorance? Is care
For a creation found at fault just there—
There where the heart breaks bond and outruns time,
To reach, not follow what shall be?

XVI.

Here's rhyme
Such as one makes now,—say, when Spring repeats
That miracle the Greek Bard sadly greets:
"Spring for the tree and herb—no Spring for us!"
Let Spring come: why, a man salutes her thus:

Dance, yellows and whites and reds,—
Lead your gay orgy, leaves, stalks, heads
Astir with the wind in the tulip-beds!

There's sunshine; scarcely a wind at all
Disturbs starved grass and daisies small
On a certain mound by a churchyard wall.

Daisies and grass be my heart's bedfellows
On the mound wind spares and sunshine mellows:
Dance you, reds and whites and yellows!

WITH CHARLES AVISON.

[See "Dictionary of National Biography," vol. ii. Charles Avison was born at Newcastle in 1710 (?), and died there in 1770. He was organist of St. Nicholas' Church. He published in 1752 "An Essay on Musical Expression," which attracted much notice, and is still respected. Avison preferred the French and Italian schools of music to the German.]

I.

How strange!—but, first of all, the little fact
Which led my fancy forth. This bitter morn
Showed me no object in the stretch forlorn
Of garden-ground beneath my window, backed
By yon worn wall wherefrom the creeper, tacked
To clothe its brickwork, hangs now, rent and racked
By five months' cruel winter,—showed no torn
And tattered ravage worse for eyes to see
Than just one ugly space of clearance, left
Bare even of the bones which used to be
Warm wrappage, safe embracement: this one cleft—
—O what a life and beauty filled it up
Startlingly, when methought the rude clay cup
Ran over with poured bright wine! 'Twas a bird
Breast-deep there, tugging at his prize, deterred
No whit by the fast-falling snow-flake: gain
Such prize my blackcap must by might and main—
The cloth-shred, still a-flutter from its nail
That fixed a spray once. Now, what told the tale
To thee,—no townsman but born orchard-thief,—
That here—surpassing moss-tuft, beard from sheaf
Of sun-scorched barley, horsehairs long and stout,
All proper country-pillage—here, no doubt,
Was just the scrap to steal should line thy nest
Superbly? Off he flew, his bill possessed
The booty sure to set his wife's each wing
Greenly a-quiver. How they climb and cling,
Hang parrot-wise to bough, these blackcaps! Strange
Seemed to a city-dweller that the finch
Should stray so far to forage: at a pinch,
Was not the fine wool's self within his range
—Filchings on every fence? But no: the need
Was of this rag of manufacture, spoiled
By art, and yet by nature near unsoiled,
New-suited to what scheming finch would breed
In comfort, this uncomfortable March.

II.

Yet—by the first pink blossom on the larch !—
This was scarce stranger than that memory,—
In want of what should cheer the stay-at-home,
My soul,—must straight clap pinion, well nigh roam
A century back, nor once close plume, descry
The appropriate rag to plunder, till she pounced—
Pray, on what relic of a brain long still?
What old-world work proved forage for the bill
Of memory the far-flyer? "March" announced,
I verily believe, the dead and gone
Name of a music-maker: one of such
In England as did little or did much,
But, doing, had their day once. Avison!
Singly and solely for an air of thine,
Bold-stepping "March," foot stept to ere my hand
Could stretch an octave, I o'erlooked the band
Of majesties familiar, to decline
On thee—not too conspicuous on the list
Of worthies who by help of pipe or wire
Expressed in sound rough rage or soft desire—
Thou, whilom of Newcastle organist!

III.

So much could one—well, thinnish air effect.
Am I ungrateful? for, your March, styled "Grand,"
Did veritably seem to grow, expand,
And greaten up to title as, unchecked,
Dream-marchers marched, kept marching, slow and sure,
In time, to tune, unchangeably the same,
From nowhere into nowhere,—out they came,
Onward they passed, and in they went. No lure
Of novel modulation pricked the flat
Forthright persisting melody,—no hint
That discord, sound asleep beneath the flint,
—Struck—might spring spark-like, claim due tit-for-tat,
Quenched in a concord. No! Yet, such the might
Of quietude's immutability,
That somehow coldness gathered warmth, well nigh
Quickened—which could not be!—grew burning-bright
With fife-shriek, cymbal-clash and trumpet-blare,
To drum-accentuation: pacing turned
Striding, and striding grew gigantic, spurned
At last the narrow space 'twixt earth and air,
So shook me back into my sober self.

IV.

And where woke I? The March had set me down
There whence I plucked the measure, as his brown
Frayed flannel-bit my blackcap. Great John Relfe,
Master of mine, learned, redoubtable,
It little needed thy consummate skill
To fitly figure such a bass! The key
Was—should not memory play me false—well, C.
Ay, with the Greater Third, in Triple Time,
Three crotchets to a bar: no change, I grant,
Except from Tonic down to Dominant.
And yet—and yet—if I could put in rhyme
The manner of that marching!—which had stopped
—I wonder, where?—but that my weak self dropped
From out the ranks, to rub eyes disentranced
And feel that, after all the way advanced,
Back must I foot it, I and my compeers,
Only to reach, across a hundred years,
The bandsman Avison whose little book
And large tune thus had led me the long way
(As late a rag my blackcap) from to-day
And to-day's music-manufacture,—Brahms,
Wagner, Dvorak, Liszt,—to where—trumpets, shawms,
Show yourselves joyful!—Handel reigns—supreme?
By no means! Buononcini's work is theme

For fit laudation of the impartial few:
(We stand in England, mind you!) Fashion too
Favours Geminiani[1]—of those choice
Concertos: nor there wants a certain voice
Raised in thy favour likewise, famed Pepusch[2]
Dear to our great-grandfathers! In a bush
Of Doctor's wig, they prized thee timing beats
While Greenway trilled "Alexis." Such were feats
Of music in thy day—dispute who list—
Avison, of Newcastle organist!

V.

And here's your music all alive once more—
As once it was alive, at least: just so
The figured worthies of a waxwork-show
Attest—such people, years and years ago,
Looked thus when outside death had life below,
—Could say "We are now," not "We were of yore,"
—"Feel how our pulses leap!" and not "Explore—
Explain why quietude has settled o'er
Surface once all-awork!" Ay, such a "Suite"
Roused heart to rapture, such a "Fugue" would catch
Soul heavenwards up, when time was: why attach
Blame to exhausted faultlessness, no match
For fresh achievement? Feat once—ever feat!
How can completion grow still more complete?
Hear Avison! He tenders evidence
That music in his day as much absorbed
Heart and soul then as Wagner's music now.
Perfect from centre to circumference—
Orbed to the full can be but fully orbed:
And yet—and yet—whence comes it that "O Thou"—
Sighed by the soul at eve to Hesperus—
Will not again take wing and fly away
(Since fatal Wagner fixed it fast for us)
In some unmodulated minor? Nay,
Even by Handel's help!

[1] An Italian fiddler, who came to London in 1714.

[2] A German musician, organist at the Charter House; died 1752.

VI.

I state it thus:
There is no truer truth obtainable
By Man than comes of music. "Soul"—(accept
A word which vaguely names what no adept
In word-use fits and fixes so that still
Thing shall not slip word's fetter and remain
Innominate as first, yet, free again,
Is no less recognized the absolute
Fact underlying that same other fact
Concerning which no cavil can dispute
Our nomenclature when we call it "Mind"—
Something not Matter)—"Soul," who seeks shall find
Distinct beneath that something. You exact
An illustrative image? This may suit.

VII.

We see a work: the worker works behind,
Invisible himself. Suppose his act
Be to o'erarch a gulf: he digs, transports,
Shapes and, through enginery—all sizes, sorts,
Lays stone by stone until a floor compact
Proves our bridged causeway. So works Mind—by stress
Of faculty, with loose facts, more or less,
Builds up our solid knowledge: all the same,
Underneath rolls what Mind may hide not tame,
An element which works beyond our guess,
Soul, the unsounded sea—whose lift of surge,
Spite of all superstructure, lets emerge,
In flower and foam, Feeling from out the deeps
Mind arrogates no mastery upon—
Distinct indisputably. Has there gone
To dig up, drag forth, render smooth from rough
Mind's flooring,—operosity enough?
Still the successive labour of each inch,
Who lists may learn: from the last turn of winch
That let the polished slab-stone find its place,
To the first prod of pick-axe at the base
Of the unquarried mountain,—what was all
Mind's varied process except natural,

Nay, easy, even, to descry, describe,
After our fashion? "So worked Mind: its tribe
Of senses ministrant above, below,
Far, near, or now or haply long ago
Brought to pass knowledge." But Soul's sea, —drawn whence,
Fed how, forced whither,—by what evidence
Of ebb and flow, that's felt beneath the tread,
Soul has its course 'neath Mind's work overhead,—
Who tells of, tracks to source the founts of Soul?
Yet wherefore heaving sway and restless roll
This side and that, except to emulate
Stability above? To match and mate
Feeling with knowledge,—make as manifest
Soul's work as Mind's work, turbulence as rest,
Hates, loves, joys, woes, hopes, fears, that rise and sink
Ceaselessly, passion's transient flit and wink,
A ripple's tinting or a spume-sheet's spread
Whitening the wave,—to strike all this life dead,
Run mercury into a mould like lead,
And henceforth have the plain result to show—
How we Feel, hard and fast as what we Know—
This were the prize and is the puzzle!—which
Music essays to solve: and here's the hitch
That baulks her of full triumph else to boast.

VIII.

All Arts endeavour this, and she the most
Attains thereto, yet fails of touching: why?
Does Mind get Knowledge from Art's ministry?
What's known once is known ever: Arts arrange,
Dissociate, re-distribute, interchange
Part with part, lengthen, broaden, high or deep
Construct their bravest,—still such pains produce
Change, not creation: simply what lay loose
At first lies firmly after, what design
Was faintly traced in hesitating line
Once on a time, grows firmly resolute
Henceforth and evermore. Now, could we shoot
Liquidity into a mould,—some way
Arrest Soul's evanescent moods, and keep
Unalterably still the forms that leap
To life for once by help of Art!—which yearns
To save its capture: Poetry discerns,
Painting is 'ware of passion's rise and fall,
Bursting, subsidence, intermixture—all
A-seethe within the gulf. Each Art a-strain
Would stay the apparition,—nor in vain:
The Poet's word-mesh, Painter's sure and swift
Colour-and-line-throw—proud the prize they lift!
Thus felt Man and thus looked Man,—passions caught
I' the midway swim of sea,—not much, if aught,
Of nether-brooding loves, hates, hopes and fears,
Enwombed past Art's disclosure. Fleet the years,
And still the Poet's page holds Helena
At gaze from topmost Troy—"But where are they,
My brothers, in the armament I name
Hero by hero? Can it be that shame
For their lost sister holds them from the war?"
—Knowing not they already slept afar
Each of them in his own dear native land.
Still on the Painter's fresco, from the hand
Of God takes Eve the life-spark whereunto
She trembles up from nothingness. Outdo
Both of them, Music! Dredging deeper yet,
Drag into day,—by sound, thy master-net,—
The abysmal bottom-growth, ambiguous thing
Unbroken of a branch, palpitating
With limbs' play and life's semblance! There it lies,
Marvel and mystery, of mysteries
And marvels, most to love and laud thee for!
Save it from chance and change we most abhor!

Give momentary feeling permanence,
So that thy capture hold, a century hence,
Truth's very heart of truth as, safe to-day,
The Painter's Eve, the Poet's Helena,
Still rapturously bend, afar still throw
The wistful gaze! Thanks, Homer, Angelo!
Could Music rescue thus from Soul's profound,
Give feeling immortality by sound,
Then were she queenliest of Arts! Alas—
As well expect the rainbow not to pass!
"Praise 'Radaminta'[1]—love attains therein
To perfect utterance! Pity—what shall win
Thy secret like 'Rinaldo'?"[1]—so men said:
Once all was perfume—now, the flower is dead—
They spied tints, sparks have left the spar!
Love, hate,
Joy, fear, survive,—alike importunate
As ever to go walk the world again,
Nor ghost-like pant for outlet all in vain
Till Music loose them, fit each filmily
With form enough to know and name it by
For any recognizer sure of ken
And sharp of ear, no grosser denizen
Of earth than needs be. Nor to such appeal
Is Music long obdurate: off they steal—
How gently, dawn-doomed phantoms! back come they
Full-blooded with new crimson of broad day—
Passion made palpable once more. Ye look
Your last on Handel? Gaze your first on Gluck!
Why wistful search, O waning ones, the chart
Of stars for you while Haydn, while Mozart
Occupies heaven? These also, fanned to fire,
Flamboyant wholly,—so perfections tire,—
Whiten to wanness, till . . . let others note
The ever-new invasion!

IX.

I devote
Rather my modicum of parts to use
What power may yet avail to re-infuse
(In fancy, please you!) sleep that looks like death
With momentary liveliness, lend breath
To make the torpor half inhale. O Relfe,
An all-unworthy pupil, from the shelf
Of thy laboratory, dares unstop
Bottle, ope box, extract thence pinch and drop
Of dusts and dews a many thou didst shrine
Each in its right receptacle, assign
To each its proper office, letter large
Label and label, then with solemn charge,
Reviewing learnedly the list complete
Of chemical reactives, from thy feet
Push down the same to me, attent below,
Power in abundance: armed wherewith I go
To play the enlivener. Bring good antique stuff!
Was it alight once? Still lives spark enough
For breath to quicken, run the smouldering ash
Red right-through. What, "stone-dead" were fools so rash
As style my Avison, because he lacked
Modern appliance, spread out phrase unracked
By modulations fit to make each hair
Stiffen upon his wig? See there—and there!
I sprinkle my reactives, pitch broadcast
Discords and resolutions, turn aghast
Melody's easy-going, jostle law
With licence, modulate (no Bach in awe),
Change enharmonically (Hudl to thank),
And lo, upstart the flamelets,—what was blank
Turns scarlet, purple, crimson! Straightway scanned
By eyes that like new lustre—Love once more
Yearns through the Largo, Hatred as before
Rages in the Rubato: e'en thy March,
My Avison, which, sooth to say—(ne'er arch
Eyebrows in anger!)—timed, in Georgian years
The step precise of British Grenadiers
To such a nicety,—if score I crowd,
If rhythm I break, if beats I vary,—tap
At bar's off-starting turns true thunder-clap,
Ever the pace augmented till—what's here?
Titanic striding toward Olympus!

[1] Operas by Handel.

X.

Fear
No such irreverent innovation! Still
Glide on, go rolling, water-like, at will—
Nay, were thy melody in monotone,
The due three-parts dispensed with!

XI.

This alone
Comes of my tiresome talking: Music's throne
Seats somebody whom somebody unseats,
And whom in turn—by who knows what new feats
Of strength,—shall somebody as sure push down,
Consign him dispossessed of sceptre, crown,
And orb imperial—whereto?—Never dream
That what once lived shall ever die! They seem
Dead—do they? lapsed things lost in limbo? Bring
Our life to kindle theirs, and straight each king
Starts, you shall see, stands up, from head to foot
No inch that is not Purcell! Wherefore? (Suit
Measure to subject, first—no marching on
Yet in thy bold C Major, Avison,
As suited step a minute since: no: wait–
Into the minor key first modulate—
Gently with A, now—in the Lesser Third!)

XII.

Of all the lamentable debts incurred
By Man through buying knowledge, this were worst:
That he should find his last gain prove his first
Was futile—merely nescience absolute,
Not knowledge in the bud which holds a fruit
Haply undreamed of in the soul's Spring-tide,
Pursed in the petals Summer opens wide,
And Autumn, withering, rounds to perfect ripe,—
Not this,—but ignorance, a blur to wipe
From human records, late it graced so much.
"Truth — this attainment? Ah, but such and such
Beliefs of yore seemed inexpugnable
When we attained them! E'en as they, so will
This their successor have the due morn, noon,
Evening and night—just as an old-world tune
Wears out and drops away, until who hears
Smilingly questions—'This it was brought tears
Once to all eyes,—this roused heart's rapture once?'
So will it be with truth that, for the nonce,
Styles itself truth perennial: 'ware its wile!
Knowledge turns nescience,—foremost on the file,
Simply proves first of our delusions."

XIII.

Now—
Blare it forth, bold C Major! Lift thy brow,
Man, the immortal, that wast never fooled
With gifts no gifts at all, nor ridiculed—
Man knowing—he who nothing knew! As Hope,
Fear, Joy, and Grief,—though ampler stretch and scope
They seek and find in novel rhythm, fresh phrase,—
Were equally existent in far days
Of Music's dim beginning—even so,
Truth was at full within thee long ago,
Alive as now it takes what latest shape
May startle thee by strangeness. Truths escape
Time's insufficient garniture: they fade,
They fall—those sheathings now grown sere, whose aid
Was infinite to truth they wrapped, saved fine
And free through March frost: May dews crystalline
Nourish truth merely,—does June boast the fruit
As—not new vesture merely but, to boot,
Novel creation? Soon shall fade and fall
Myth after myth—the husk-like lies I call
New truth's corolla-safeguard: Autumn comes,
So much the better!

XIV.

Therefore—bang the drums,
Blow the trumpets, Avison! March-motive? that's
Truth which endures resetting. Sharps and flats,
Lavish at need, shall dance athwart thy score
When ophicleide and bombardon's uproar
Mate the approaching trample, even now
Big in the distance—or my ears deceive—
Of federated England, fitly weave
March-music for the Future!

XV.

Or suppose
Back, and not forward, transformation goes?
Once more some sable-stoled procession—say,
From Little-ease to Tyburn—wends its way,
Out of the dungeon to the gallows-tree
Where heading, hacking, hanging is to be
Of half-a-dozen recusants—this day
Three hundred years ago! How duly drones
Elizabethan plain-song—dim antique
Grown clarion-clear the while I humbly wreak
A classic vengeance on thy March! It moans—
Larges and Longs and Breves displacing quite
Crotchet-and-quaver pertness—brushing bars
Aside and filling vacant sky with stars
Hidden till now that day returns to night.

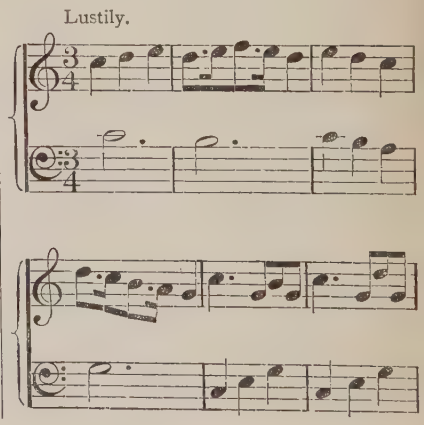
XVI.

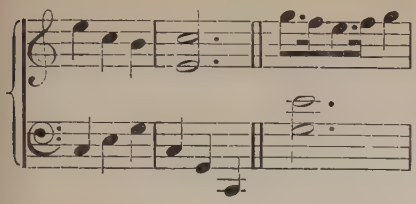
Nor night nor day: one purpose move us both,
Be thy mood mine! As thou wast minded, Man's
The cause our music champions: I were loth
To think we cheered our troop to Preston Pans
Ignobly: back to times of England's best!
Parliament stands for privilege—life and limb
Guards Hollis, Haselrig, Strode, Hampden, Pym,
The famous Five. There's rumour of arrest.
Bring up the Train Bands, Southwark! They protest:
Shall we not all join chorus? Hark the hymn,
—Rough, rude, robustious—homely heart a-throb,
Harsh voice a-hallo, as beseems the mob!
How good is noise! what's silence but despair
Of making sound match gladness never there?
Give me some great glad "subject," glorious Bach,
Where cannon-roar not organ-peal we lack!
Join in, give voice robustious rude and rough,—
Avison helps—so heart lend noise enough!

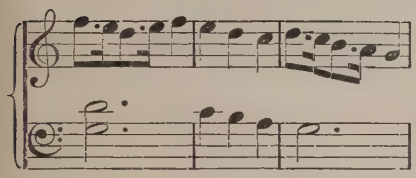
Fife, trump, drum, sound! and singers then,
Marching, say "Pym, the man of men!"
Up, heads, your proudest—out, throats, your loudest—
"Somerset's Pym!"

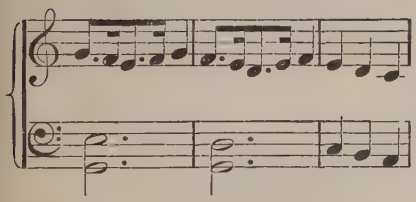
Strafford from the block, Eliot from the den,
Foes, friends, shout "Pym, our citizen!"
Wail, the foes he quelled,—hail, the friends he held,
"Tavistock's Pym!"

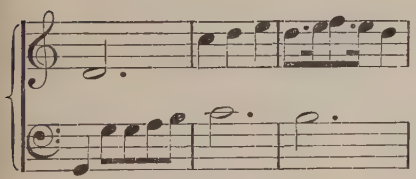
Hearts prompt heads, hands that ply the pen
Teach babes unborn the where and when
—Tyrants, he braved them,—patriots, he saved them—
"Westminster's Pym!"

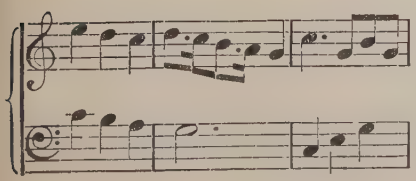


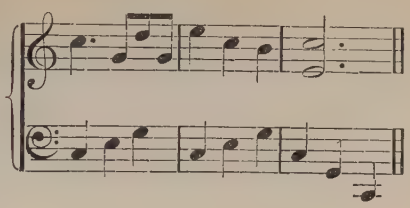












FUST AND HIS FRIENDS.

AN EPILOGUE.

[Fust or Faust was a German printer, and a partner of Gutenberg from about 1450 to 1455. On the dissolution of the partnership, Fust carried on the business with his son-in-law, Peter Schöffer. Whether Fust was really the inventor of the movable types, is uncertain.]

Inside the House of Fust, Mayence, 1457.

FIRST FRIEND.

Up, up, up—next step of the staircase
Lands us, lo, at the chamber of dread!

SECOND FRIEND.

Locked and barred?

THIRD FRIEND.

Door open—the rare case!

FOURTH FRIEND.

Ay, there he leans—lost wretch!

FIFTH FRIEND.

His head
Sunk on his desk 'twixt his arms outspread!

SIXTH FRIEND.

Hallo, — wake, man, ere God thunderstrike Mayence
—Mulct for thy sake who art Satan's, John Fust!
Satan installed here, God's rule in abeyance,
Mayence some morning may crumble to dust.
Answer our questions thou shalt and thou must!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Softly and fairly! Wherefore a-gloom?
Greet us, thy gossipry, cousin and sib!
Raise the forlorn brow, Fust! Make room—
Let daylight through arms which, enfolding thee, crib
From those clenched lids the comfort of sunshine!

FIRST FRIEND.

So glib
Thy tongue slides to "comfort" already? Not mine!
Behoves us deal roundly: the wretch is distraught
—Too well I guess wherefore! Behoves a Divine
—Such as I, by grace, boast me—to threaten one caught
In the enemy's toils,—setting "comfort" at nought.

SECOND FRIEND.

Nay, Brother, so hasty? I heard—nor long since—
Of a certain Black Artsman who,—helplessly bound
By rash pact with Satan,—through paying—why mince
The matter?—fit price to the Church,—safe and sound
Full a year after death in his grave-clothes was found.

Whereas 'tis notorious the Fiend claims his due
During lifetime,—comes clawing, with talons aflame,
The soul from the flesh-rags left smoking and blue:
So it happed with John Faust; lest John Fust fare the same,—
Look up, I adjure thee by God's holy name!

For neighbours and friends—no foul hell-brood flock we!
Saith Solomon "Words of the wise are as goads:"
Ours prick but to startle from torpor, set free
Soul and sense from death's drowse.

FIRST FRIEND.

And soul, wakened, unloads
Much sin by confession: no mere palinodes!

—"I was youthful and wanton, am old yet no sage:
When angry I cursed, struck and slew: did I want?
Right and left did I rob: though no war I dared wage
With the Church (God forbid!)—harm her least ministrant—
Still I outraged all else. Now that strength is grown scant,

I am probity's self"—no such bleatings as these!
But avowal of guilt so enormous, it baulks
Tongue's telling. Yet penitence prompt may appease
God's wrath at thy bond with the Devil who stalks
—Strides hither to strangle thee!

FUST.

Childhood so talks.
Not rare wit nor ripe age—ye boast them, my neighbours!—
Should lay such a charge on your townsman, this Fust
Who, known for a life spent in pleasures and labours
If freakish yet venial, could scarce be induced
To traffic with fiends.

FIRST FRIEND.

So, my words have unloosed
A plie from those pale lips corrugate but now?

FUST.

Lost count me, yet not as ye lean to surmise.

FIRST FRIEND.

To surmise? to establish! Unbury that brow!
Look up, that thy judge may read clear in thine eyes!

SECOND FRIEND.

By your leave, Brother Barnabite! Mine to advise!

—Who arraign thee, John Fust! What was bruited erewhile
Now bellows through Mayence. All cry —thou hast trucked
Salvation away for lust's solace! Thy smile
Takes its hue from hell's smoulder!

FUST.

Too certain! I sucked
—Got drunk at the nipple of sense.

SECOND FRIEND.

Thou hast ducked—

Art drowned there, say rather! Faugh—fleshly disport!
How else but by help of Sir Belial didst win
That Venus-like lady, no drudge of thy sort
Could lure to become his accomplice in sin?
Folk nicknamed her Helen of Troy!

FIRST FRIEND.

Best begin

At the very beginning. Thy father,—all knew,
A mere goldsmith . . .

FUST.

Who knew him,
perchance may know this—
He dying left much gold and jewels no few:
Whom these help to court with but seldom shall miss
The love of a leman: true witchcraft, I wis!

FIRST FRIEND.

Dost flout me? 'Tis said, in debauchery's guild
Admitted prime guttler and guzzler—O swine!—
To honour thy headship, those tosspots so swilled
That out of their table there sprouted a vine
Whence each claimed a cluster, awaiting thy sign
To out knife, off mouthful: when — who could suppose
Such malice in magic?—each sot woke and found
Cold steel but an inch from the neighbour's red nose
He took for a grape-bunch!

FUST.

Does that so astound
Sagacity such as ye boast,—who surround

Your mate with eyes staring, hairs standing erect
At his magical feats? Are good burghers unversed
In the humours of toping? Full oft, I suspect,
Ye, counting your fingers, call thumbkin their first,
And reckon a groat every guilder disbursed.

What marvel if wags, while the skinker fast brimmed
Their glass with rare tipple's enticement, should gloat
—Befooled and beflustered—through optics drink-dimmed—
On this draught and that, till each found in his throat
Our Rhenish smack rightly as Raphal? For, note—

They fancied—their fuddling deceived them so grossly—
That liquor sprang out of the table itself
Through gimlet-holes drilled there, — nor noticed now closely
The skinker kept plying my guests, from the shelf
O'er their heads, with the potable madness. No elf

Had need to persuade them a vine rose umbrageous,
Fruit-bearing, thirst-quenching! Enough! I confess
To many such fool-pranks, but none so outrageous
That Satan was called in to help me: excess
I own to, I grieve at—no more and no less.

SECOND FRIEND.

Strange honours were heaped on thee—medal for breast,
Chain for neck, sword for thigh: not a lord of the land
But acknowledged thee peer! What ambition possessed
A goldsmith by trade, with craft's grime on his hand,
To seek such associates?

FUST.

Spare taunts! Understand—

I submit me! Of vanities under the sun,
Pride seized me at last as concupiscence first,
Crapulosity ever: true Fiends, everyone,
Haled this way and that my poor soul: thus amerced—
Forgive and forget me!

FIRST FRIEND.

Had flesh sinned the worst,

Yet help were in counsel: the Church could absolve:
But say not men truly thou barredst escape
By signing and sealing . . .

SECOND FRIEND.

On me must devolve
The task of extracting . . .

FIRST FRIEND.

Shall Barnabites ape
Us Dominican experts?

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Nay, Masters,—agape

When Hell yawns for a soul, 'tis myself claim the task
Of extracting, by just one plain question, God's truth!
Where's Peter Genesheim thy partner? I ask
Why, cloistered up still in thy room, the pale youth
Slaves tongue-tied — thy trade brooks no tattling forsooth!
No less he, thy *famulus*, suffers entrapping,
Succumbs to good fellowship: barrel a-broach
Runs freely nor needs any subsequent tapping:
Quoth Peter "That room, none but I dare approach,
Holds secrets will help me to ride in my coach."

He prattles, we profit: in brief, he assures
Thou hast taught him to speak so that all men may hear
—Each alike, wide world over, Jews, Pagans, Turks, Moors,
The same as we Christians—speech heard far and near
At one and the same magic moment!

FUST.

That's clear!

Said he—how?

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Is it like he was licensed to learn?
Who doubts but thou dost this by aid of the Fiend?
Is it so? So it is, for thou smilest! Go, burn
To ashes, since such proves thy portion, unscreened
By bell, book and candle! Yet lately I weened

Balm yet was in Gilead,—some healing instore
For the friend of my bosom. Men said thou wast sunk
In a sudden despondency: not, as before,
Fust gallant and gay with his pottle and punk,
But sober, sad, sick as one yesterday drunk!

FUST.

Spare Fust, then, thus contrite! — who, youthful and healthy,
Equipped for life's struggle with culture of mind,
Sound flesh and sane soul in coherence, born wealthy,
Nay, wise—how he wasted endowment designed
For the glory of God and the good of mankind

That much were misused such occasions of grace
Ye well may upbraid him, who bows to the rod.
But this should bid anger to pity give place—
He has turned from the wrong, in the right path to plod,
Makes amends to mankind and craves pardon of God.

Yea, friends, even now from my lips the *Heureka*—
Soul saved!" was nigh bursting—unduly elate!
Have I brought Man advantage, or hatched —so to speak—a
Strange serpent, no cygnet? 'Tis this I debate
Within me. Forbear, and leave Fust to his fate!

FIRST FRIEND.

So abject, late lofty? Methinks I spy respite.
Make clean breast, discover what mysteries hide
In thy room there!

SECOND FRIEND.

Ay, out with them! Do Satan despite!
Remember what caused his undoing was pride!

FIRST FRIEND.

Dumb devil! Remains one resource to be tried!

SECOND FRIEND.

Exorcize!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Nay, first—is there any remembers
In substance that potent "*Ne pulvis*"—a psalm
Whereof some live spark haply lurks mid the embers
Which choke in my brain. Talk of "Gilead and balm"?
I mind me, sung half through, this gave such a qualm

To Asmodeus inside of a Hussite, that, queasy,
He broke forth in brimstone with curses. I'm strong
In—at least the commencement: the rest should go easy,
Friends helping. "*Ne pulvis et ignis*" . . .

SIXTH FRIEND.

All wrong!

FIFTH FRIEND.

I've conned till I captured the whole.

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Get along!

"*Ne pulvis et cinis superbe te geras,*
Nam fulmina" . . .

SIXTH FRIEND.

Fiddlestick! Peace, dolts and dorrs!
Thus runs it "*Ne Numinis fulmina feras*"—
Then "*Hominis perfidi justa sunt sors*
Fulmen et grando et horrida mors."

SEVENTH FRIEND.

You blunder. "*Irati ne*" . . .

SIXTH FRIEND.

Mind your own business!

FIFTH FRIEND.

I do not so badly, who gained the monk's leave
To study an hour his choice parchment. A dizziness
Máy well have surprised me. No Christian dares thieve,
Or I scarce had returned him his treasure. These cleave:

"*Nos pulvis et cinis, trementes, gementes,*
Venimus"—some such word—"*ad te, Domine.*
Da lumen, juvamen, ut sancta sequentes
Cor . . . corda . . ." Plague take it!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

—"*erecta sint spe:*"
Right text, ringing rhyme, and ripe Latin for me!

SIXTH FRIEND.

A Canon's self wrote it me fair: I was tempted
To part with the sheepskin.

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Didst grasp and let go
Such a godsend, thou Judas? My purse had been emptied
Ere part with the prize!

FUST.

Do I dream? Say ye so?
Clouds break, then! Move, world! I have gained my "*Pou sto*"!

I am saved: Archimedes, salute me!

OMNES.

Assistance!
Help, Angels! He summons . . . Aroint thee!—by name,
His familiar!

FUST.

Approach!

OMNES.

Devil, keep thy due distance!

FUST.

Be tranquillized, townsmen! The knowledge ye claim
Behold, I prepare to impart. Praise or blame,—

Your blessing or banning, whatever betide me,
At last I accept. The slow travail of years,
The long-teeming brain's birth—applaud me, deride me,—
At last claims revealment. Wait!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Wait till appears
Uncaged Archimedes cooped-up there?

SECOND FRIEND.

Who fears?

Here's have at thee!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Correctly now! "*Pulvis et cinis*" . . .

FUST.

The verse ye so value, it happens I hold
In my memory safe from *initium* to *finis*.
Word for word, I produce you the whole, plain enrolled,
Black letters, white paper—no scribe's red and gold!

OMNES.

Aroint thee!

FUST.

I go and return.
[*He enters the inner room.*

FIRST FRIEND.

Ay, 'tis "*ibis*"
No doubt: but as boldly "*redibis*"—who'll say?
I rather conjecture "*in Orco peribis!*"

SEVENTH FRIEND.

Come, neighbours!

SIXTH FRIEND.

I'm with you! Show courage and stay
Hell's outbreak? Sirs, cowardice here wins the day!

FIFTH FRIEND.

What luck had that student of Bamberg who ventured
To peep in the cell where a wizard of note
Was busy in getting some black deed debentured
By Satan? In dog's guise there sprang at his throat
A flame-breathing fury. Fust favours, I note,

An ugly huge lurcher!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

If I placed reliance
As thou, on the beads thou art telling so fast,
I'd risk just a peep through the keyhole.

SIXTH FRIEND.

Appliance
Of ear might be safer. Five minutes are past.

OMNES.

Saints, save us! The door is thrown open at last!

FUST (*re-enters, the door closing behind him*).

As I promised, behold I perform! Apprehend you
The object I offer is poison or pest?
Receive without harm from the hand I extend you
A gift that shall set every scruple at rest!
Shrink back from mere paper-strips? Try them and test!

Still hesitate? Myk, was it thou who lamentedst
Thy five wits clean failed thee to render aright
A poem read once and no more?—who repentedst
Vile pelf had induced thee to banish from sight
The characters none but our clerics indite?

Take and keep!

FIRST FRIEND.

Blessed Mary and all Saints about her!

SECOND FRIEND.

What imps deal so deftly,—five minutes suffice
To play thus the penman?

THIRD FRIEND.

By Thomas the Doubter,
Five minutes, no more!

FOURTH FRIEND.

Out on arts that entice
Such scribes to do homage!

FIFTH FRIEND.

Stay! Once—and now twice—
Yea, a third time, my sharp eye completes the inspection
Of line after line, the whole series, and finds
Each letter join each—not a fault for detection!
Such upstrokes, such downstrokes, such strokes of all kinds
In the criss-cross, all perfect!

SIXTH FRIEND.

There's nobody minds
His quill-craft with more of a conscience, o'erscratches
A sheepskin more nimbly and surely with ink,
Than Paul the Sub-Prior: here's paper that matches
His parchment with letter on letter, no link
Overleapt—underlost!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

No erasure, I think—
No blot, I am certain!

FUST.

Accept the new treasure!

SIXTH FRIEND.

I remembered full half!

SEVENTH FRIEND.

But who other than I
(Bear witness, bystanders!) when he broke the measure
Repaired fault with "*fulmen*"?

FUST.

Put bickerings by!
Here's for thee—thee—and thee, too: at need a supply [*distributing Proofs.*
For Mayence, though seventy times seven should muster!
How now? All so feeble of faith that no face
Which fronts me but whitens—or yellows, were juster?
Speak out lest I summon my Spirits!

OMNES.

Grace—grace!
Call none of thy—helpmates! We'll answer apace!

My paper—and mine—and mine also—they vary
In nowise—agree in each tittle and jot!
Fust, how—why was this?

FUST.

Shall such "*Cur*" miss a "*quare*"?
Within, there! Throw doors wide! Behold who complot
To abolish the scribe's work—blur, blunder and blot!
[*The doors open, and the Press is discovered in operation.*
Brave full-bodied birth of this brain that conceived thee
In splendour and music,—sustained the slow drag
Of the days stretched to years dim with doubt,—yet believed thee,
Had faith in thy first leap of life! Pulse might flag—
—Mine fluttered how faintly!—Arch-moment might lag

Its longest—I bided, made light of endurance,
Held hard by the hope of an advent which—dreamed,
Is done now: night yields to the dawn's reassurance:
I have thee—I hold thee—my fancy that seemed,
My fact that proves palpable! Ay, Sirs, I schemed

Completion that's fact: see this Engine—be witness
Yourselves of its working! Nay, handle my Types!
Each block bears a Letter: in order and fitness
I range them. Turn, Peter, the winch! See, it gripes
What's under! Let loose—draw! In regular stripes
Lies plain, at one pressure, your poem—touched, tinted,
Turned out to perfection! The sheet, late a blank,
Filled—ready for reading,—not written but PRINTED!
Omniscient omnipotent God, Thee I thank,
Thee ever, Thee only!—Thy creature that shrank

From no task Thou, Creator, imposedst! Creation
Revealed me no object, from insect to Man,
But bore Thy hand's impress: earth glowed with salvation:
"Hast sinned? Be thou saved, Fust! Continue my plan,
Who spake and earth was: with my word things began.

"As sound so went forth, to the sight be extended
Word's mission henceforward! The task I assign,
Embrace—thy allegiance to evil is ended!
Have cheer, soul impregnate with purpose! Combine
Soul and body, give birth to my concept—called thine!

"Far and wide, North and South, East and West, have dominion
O'er thought, winged wonder, O Word! Traverse world
In sun-flash and sphere-song! Each beat of thy pinion
Bursts night, beckons day: once Truth's banner unfurled,
Where's Falsehood? Sun-smitten, to nothingness hurled!"

More humbly—so, friends, did my fault find redemption.
I sinned, soul-entoiled by the tether of sense:
My captor reigned master: I plead no exemption
From Satan's award to his servant: defence
From the fiery and final assault would be—whence?

By making—as man might—to truth restitution !
Truth is God : trample lies and lies' father, God's foe !
Fix fact fast : truths change by an hour's revolution :
What deed's very doer, unaided, can show
How 'twas done a year—month—week—day—minute ago ?

At best, he relates it—another reports it—
A third—nay, a thousandth records it : and still
Narration, tradition, no step but distorts it,
As down from truth's height it goes sliding until
At the low level lie-mark it stops—whence no skill

Of the scribe, intervening too tardily, rescues
—Once fallen—lost fact from lie's fate there. What scribe
—Eyes horny with poring, hands crippled with desk-use,
Brains fretted by fancies—the volatile tribe
That tease weary watchers—can boast that no bribe

Shuts eye and frees hand and remits brain from toiling ?
Truth gained—can we stay, at whatever the stage,
Truth a-slide,—save her snow from its ultimate soiling
In mire,—by some process, stamp promptly on page
Fact spoiled by pen's plodding, make truth heritage

Not merely of clerics, but poured out, full measure,
On clowns—every mortal endowed with a mind ?
Read, gentle and simple ! Let labour win leisure
At last to bid truth do all duty assigned,
Not pause at the noble but pass to the hind !

How bring to effect such swift sure simultaneous
Unlimited multiplication ? How spread
By an arm-sweep a hand-throw—no helping extraneous—
Truth broadcast o'er Europe ? "The goldsmith," I said,
"Graves limning on gold : why not letters on lead ?"

So, Tuscan artificer, grudge not thy pardon
To me who played false, made a furtive descent,
Found the sly secret workshop,—thy genius kept guard on
Too slackly for once,—and surprised thee low-bent
O'er thy labour—some chalice thy tool would indent

With a certain free scroll-work framed round by a border
Of foliage and fruitage : no scratching so fine,
No shading so shy but, in ordered disorder,
Each flourish came clear,—unbewildered by shine,
On the gold, irretrievably right, lay each line.

How judge if thy hand worked thy will ? By reviewing,
Revising again and again, piece by piece,
Tool's performance,—this way, as I watched.
'Twas through glueing
A paper-like film-stuff—thin, smooth, void of crease,
On each cut of the graver : press hard ! at release,

No mark on the plate, but the paper showed double :
His work might proceed : as he judged—space or speck
Up he filled, forth he flung—was relieved thus from trouble
Lest wrong—once—were right never more : what could check
Advancement, completion ? Thus lay at my beck—

At my call — triumph likewise! "For," cried I, "what hinders
That graving turns Printing? Stamp one word—not one
But fifty such, phœnix-like, spring from death's cinders,—
Since death is word's doom, clerics hide from the sun
As some churl closets up this rare chalice." Go, run

Thy race now, Fust's child! High, O Printing, and holy
Thy mission! These types, see, I chop and I change
Till the words, every letter, a pageful, not slowly
Yet surely lies fixed: last of all, I arrange
A paper beneath, stamp it, loosen it!

FIRST FRIEND.

Strange!

SECOND FRIEND.

How simple exceedingly!

FUST.

Bustle, my Schœffer!
Set type,—quick, Genesheim! Turn screw now!

THIRD FRIEND.

Just that!

FOURTH FRIEND.

And no such vast miracle!

FUST.

"Plough with my heifer,
Ye find out my riddle," quoth Samson, and pat
He speaks to the purpose. Grapes squeezed in the vat

Yield to sight and to taste what is simple—a liquid
Mere urchins may sip: but give time, let ferment—
You've wine, manhood's master! Well, "*rectius si quid*
Novistis im-per-ti-te!" Wait the event,
Then weigh the result! But whate'er Thy intent,

O Thou, the one force in the whole variation
Of visible nature,—at work—do I doubt?—
From Thy first to our last, in perpetual creation—
A film hides us from Thee—'twixt inside and out,
A film, on this earth where Thou bringest about

New marvels, new forms of the glorious, the gracious,
We bow to, we bless for: no star bursts heaven's dome
But Thy finger impels it, no weed peeps audacious
Earth's clay-floor from out, but Thy finger makes room
For one world's-want the more in Thy Cosmos: presume

Shall Man, Microcosmos, to claim the conception
Of grandeur, of beauty, in thought, word or deed?
I toiled, but Thy light on my dubiousest step shone:
If I reach the glad goal, is it I who succeed
Who stumbled at starting tripped up by a reed,

Or Thou? Knowledge only and absolute, glory
As utter be Thine who concedest a spark
Of Thy spheric perfection to earth's transitory
Existences! Nothing that lives, but Thy mark
Gives law to—life's light: what is doomed to the dark?

Where's ignorance? Answer, creation! What height,
What depth has escaped Thy commandment—to Know?
What birth in the ore-bed but answers aright
Thy sting at its heart which impels—bids "E'en so,
Not otherwise move or be motionless,—grow,

"Decline, disappear!" Is the plant in default
How to bud, when to branch forth? The bird and the beast
—Do they doubt if their safety be found in assault
Or escape? Worm or fly, of what atoms the least
But follows light's guidance,—will famish, not feast?

In such various degree, fly and worm, ore and plant,
All know, none is witless: around each, a wall
Encloses the portion, or ample or scant,
Of Knowledge: beyond which one hair's breadth, for all
Lies blank—not so much as a blackness—a pall

Some sense unimagined must penetrate: plain
Is only old licence to stand, walk or sit,
Move so far and so wide in the narrow domain
Allotted each nature for life's use: past it
How immensity spreads does he guess? Not a whit.

Does he care? Just as little. Without? No, within
Concerns him? he Knows. Man Ignores —thanks to Thee
Who madest him know, but—in knowing—begin
To know still new vastness of knowledge must be
Outside him—to enter, to traverse, in fee

Have and hold! "Oh, Man's ignorance!" hear the fool whine!
How were it, for better or worse, didst thou grunt
Contented with sapience—the lot of the swine
Who knows he was born for just truffles to hunt?—
Monks' Paradise—"*Semper sint res uti sunt!*"

No, Man's the prerogative—knowledge once gained—
To ignore,—find new knowledge to press for, to swerve
In pursuit of, no, not for a moment: attained—
Why, onward through ignorance! Dare and deserve!
As still to its asymptote speedeth the curve,

So approximates Man—Thee, who, reachable not,
Hast formed him to yearningly follow Thy whole
Sole and single omniscience!
Such, friends, is my lot:
I am back with the world: one more step to the goal
Thanks for reaching I render—Fust's help to Man's soul!

Mere mechanical help? So the hand gives a toss
To the falcon,—aloft once, spread pinions and fly,
Beat air far and wide, up and down and across!
My Press strains a-tremble: whose masterful eye
Will be first, in new regions, new truth to descry?

Give chase, soul! Be sure each new capture consigned
To my Types will go forth to the world, like God's bread
—Miraculous food not for body but mind,
Truth's manna! How say you? Put case that, instead
Of old leasing and lies, we superiorly fed

These Heretics, Hussites . . .

FIRST FRIEND.

First answer my query!
If saved, art thou happy?

FUST.

I was and I am.

FIRST FRIEND.

Thy visage confirms it: how comes, then, that—weary
And woe-begone late—was it show, was it sham?—
We found thee sunk thiswise?

SECOND FRIEND.

—In need of the dram

From the flask which a provident neighbour might carry!

FUST.

Ah, friends, the fresh triumph soon flickers, fast fades!
I hailed Word's dispersion: could heartleaps but tarry!
Through me does Print furnish Truth wings? The same aids
Cause Falsehood to range just as widely. What raids

On a region undreamed of does Printing enable
Truth's foe to effect! Printed leasing and lies
May speed to the world's farthest corner—gross fable
No less than pure fact—to impede, neutralize,
Abolish God's gift and Man's gain!

FIRST FRIEND.

Dost surmise

What struck me at first blush? Our Beghards, Waldenses,
Jeronimites, Hussites—does one show his head,
Spout heresy now? Not a priest in his senses
Deigns answer mere speech, but piles faggots instead,
Refines as by fire, and, him silenced, all's said.

Whereas if in future I pen an opuscule
Defying retort, as of old when rash tongues
Were easy to tame,—straight some knave of the Huss-School
Prints answer forsooth! Stop invisible lungs?
The barrel of blasphemy broached once, who bungs?

SECOND FRIEND.

Does my sermon, next Easter, meet fitting acceptance?
Each captious disputative boy has his quirk
"*An cuique credendum sit?*" Well the Church kept "*ans*"
In order till Fust set his engine at work!
What trash will come flying from Jew, Moor and Turk

When, goosequill, thy reign o'er the world is abolished!
Goose — ominous name! With a goose woe began:
Quoth Huss—which means "goose" in his idiom unpolished—
"Ye burn now a Goose: there succeeds me a Swan
Ye shall find quench your fire!"

FUST.

I foresee such a man.[1]

1 Martin Luther.

ASOLANDO:

FANCIES AND FACTS.

1889.

(Published on December 12, the day on which Mr. Browning died at Venice. A copy of the volume had, however, been received by him before his death.)

[For an explanation of title, see the dedication to Mrs. Arthur Bronson.]

TO MRS. ARTHUR BRONSON.

To whom but you, dear Friend, should I dedicate verses—some few written, all of them supervised, in the comfort of your presence, and with yet another experience of the gracious hospitality now bestowed on me since so many a year,—adding a charm even to my residences at Venice, and leaving me little regret for the surprise and delight at my visits to Asolo in bygone days?

I unite, you will see, the disconnected poems by a title-name popularly ascribed to the inventiveness of the ancient secretary of Queen Cornaro whose palace-tower still overlooks us: Asolare—"to disport in the open air, amuse oneself at random." The objection that such a word nowhere occurs in the works of the Cardinal is hardly important—Bembo was too thorough a purist to conserve in print a term which in talk he might possibly toy with: but the word is more likely derived from a Spanish source. I use it for love of the place, and in requital of your pleasant assurance that an early poem of mine first attracted you thither—where and elsewhere, at La Mura as Cà Alvisi, may all happiness attend you!

Gratefully and affectionately yours,

R. B.

ASOLO: *October* 15, 1889.

PROLOGUE.

"THE Poet's age is sad: for why?
In youth, the natural world could show
No common object but his eye
At once involved with alien glow—
His own soul's iris-bow.

"And now a flower is just a flower:
Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—
Simply themselves, uncinct by dower
Of dyes which, when life's day began,
Round each in glory ran."

Friend, did you need an optic glass,
Which were your choice? A lens to drape
In ruby, emerald, chrysopras,
Each object—or reveal its shape
Clear outlined, past escape,

The naked very thing?—so clear
That, when you had the chance to gaze,
You found its inmost self appear
Through outer seeming—truth ablaze,
Not falsehood's fancy-haze?

How many a year, my Asolo,
Since—one step just from sea to land—
I found you, loved yet feared you so—
For natural objects seemed to stand
Palpably fire-clothed! No—

No mastery of mine o'er these!
Terror with beauty, like the Bush
Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
Silence 'tis awe decrees.

And now? The lambent flame is—where?
Lost from the naked world: earth, sky,
Hill, vale, tree, flower,—Italia's rare
O'er-running beauty crowds the eye—
But flame? The Bush is bare.

Hill, vale, tree, flower—they stand distinct,
Nature to know and name. What then?
A Voice spoke thence which straight unlinked
Fancy from fact: see, all's in ken:
Has once my eyelid winked?

No, for the purged ear apprehends
Earth's import, not the eye late dazed:
The Voice said "Call my works thy friends!
At Nature dost thou shrink amazed?
God is it who transcends."

ASOLO: *Sept.* 6, 1889.

ROSNY.

[Rosny is the name of the *château* where the celebrated Duke of Sully (1560–1641) was born. It lies half-way between Mantes and Bonnières. Henri Quatre slept at the *château* after Ivry.]

WOE, he went galloping into the war,
Clara, Clara!
Let us two dream: shall he 'scape with a scar?
Scarcely disfigurement, rather a grace
Making for manhood which nowise we mar:
See, while I kiss it, the flush on his face—
Rosny, Rosny!

Light does he laugh: "With your love in my soul"—
(Clara, Clara!)
"How could I other than—sound, safe and whole—
Cleave who opposed me asunder, yet stand
Scatheless beside you, as, touching love's goal,
Who won the race kneels, craves reward at your hand—
Rosny, Rosny?"

Ay, but if certain who envied should see!
Clara, Clara,
Certain who simper: "The hero for me
Hardly of life were so chary as miss
Death—death and fame—that's love's guerdon when She
Boasts, proud bereaved one, her choice fell on this
Rosny, Rosny!"

So,—go on dreaming,—he lies mid a heap
(Clara, Clara,)
Of the slain by his hand: what is death but a sleep?
Dead, with my portrait displayed on his breast:
Love wrought his undoing: "No prudence could keep
The love-maddened wretch from his fate."
That is best,
Rosny, Rosny!

DUBIETY.

I WILL be happy if but for once:
Only help me, Autumn weather,
Me and my cares to screen, ensconce
In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!

Sleep? Nay, comfort—with just a cloud
Suffusing day too clear and bright:
Eve's essence, the single drop allowed
To sully, like milk, Noon's water-white.

Let gauziness shade, not shroud,—adjust,
Dim and not deaden,—somehow sheathe
Aught sharp in the rough world's busy thrust,
If it reach me through dreaming's vapour-wreath.

Be life so, all things ever the same!
For, what has disarmed the world? Outside,
Quiet and peace: inside, nor blame
Nor want, nor wish whate'er betide.

What is it like that has happened before?
A dream? No dream, more real by much.
A vision? But fanciful days of yore
Brought many: mere musing seems not such.

Perhaps but a memory, after all!
—Of what came once when a woman leant
To feel for my brow where her kiss might fall.
Truth ever, truth only the excellent!

NOW.

OUT of your whole life give but a moment!
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it,—so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present,—condense,
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense—
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me, above me—
Me—sure that despite of time future, time past,—
This tick of our life-time's one moment you love me!
How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet—
The moment eternal—just that and no more—
When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core
While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!

HUMILITY.

WHAT girl but, having gathered flowers,
Stript the beds and spoilt the bowers,
From the lapful light she carries
Drops a careless bud?—nor tarries
To regain the waif and stray:
"Store enough for home"—she'll say.

So say I too: give your lover
Heaps of loving—under, over,
Whelm him—make the one the wealthy!
Am I all so poor who—stealthy
Work it was!—picked up what fell:
Not the worst bud—who can tell?

POETICS.

"So say the foolish!" Say the foolish so, Love?
"Flower she is, my rose"—or else "My very swan is she"—
Or perhaps "Yon maid-moon, blessing earth below, Love,
That art thou!"—to them, belike: no such vain words from me.

"Hush, rose, blush! no balm like breath," I chide it:
"Bend thy neck its best, swan,—hers the whiter curve!"
Be the moon the moon: my Love I place beside it:
What is she? Her human self,—no lower word will serve.

SUMMUM BONUM.

ALL the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and—how far above them—
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

A PEARL, A GIRL.

A SIMPLE ring with a single stone
To the vulgar eye no stone of price:
Whisper the right word, that alone—
Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice,
And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)
Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole
Through the power in a pearl.

A woman ('tis I this time that say)
With little the world counts worthy praise
Utter the true word—out and away
Escapes her soul: I am wrapt in blaze,
Creation's lord, of heaven and earth
Lord whole and sole—by a minute's birth—
Through the love in a girl!

SPECULATIVE.

Others may need new life in Heaven—
Man, Nature, Art—made new, assume!
Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
Nature—new light to clear old gloom,
Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.

I shall pray: "Fugitive as precious—
Minutes which passed,—return, remain!
Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
You with old pleasure, me—old pain,
So we but meet nor part again!"

WHITE WITCHCRAFT.

[White witchcraft was helpful and not harmful magic.]

If you and I could change to beasts, what beast should either be?
Shall you and I play Jove for once? Turn fox then, I decree!
Shy wild sweet stealer of the grapes! Now do your worst on me!

And thus you think to spite your friend—turned loathsome? What, a toad?
So, all men shrink and shun me! Dear men, pursue your road!
Leave but my crevice in the stone, a reptile's fit abode!

Now say your worst, Canidia![1] "He's loathsome, I allow:
There may or may not lurk a pearl beneath his puckered brow:
But see his eyes that follow mine—love lasts there anyhow."

BAD DREAMS. I.

Last night I saw you in my sleep:
And how your charm of face was changed!
I asked "Some love, some faith you keep?"
You answered "Faith gone, love estranged."

[1] Neapolitan sorceress. See Horace.

Whereat I woke—a twofold bliss:
Waking was one, but next there came
This other: "Though I felt, for this,
My heart break, I loved on the same."

BAD DREAMS. II.

You in the flesh and here—
Your very self! Now, wait!
One word! May I hope or fear?
Must I speak in love or hate?
Stay while I ruminate!

The fact and each circumstance
Dare you disown? Not you!
That vast dome, that huge dance,
And the gloom which overgrew
A—possibly festive crew!

For why should men dance at all—
Why women—a crowd of both—
Unless they are gay? Strange ball—
Hands and feet plighting troth,
Yet partners enforced and loth!

Of who danced there, no shape
Did I recognize: thwart, perverse,
Each grasped each, past escape
In a whirl or weary or worse:
Man's sneer met woman's curse,

While he and she toiled as if
Their guardian set galley-slaves
To supple chained limbs grown stiff:
Unmanacled trulls and knaves—
The lash for who misbehaves!

And a gloom was, all the while,
Deeper and deeper yet
O'ergrowing the rank and file
Of that army of haters—set
To mimic love's fever-fret.

By the wall-side close I crept,
Avoiding the livid maze,
And, safely so far, outstepped
On a chamber—a chapel, says
My memory or betrays—

Closet-like, kept aloof
From unseemly witnessing
What sport made floor and roof
Of the Devil's palace ring
While his Damned amused their king.

Ay, for a low lamp burned,
And a silence lay about
What I, in the midst, discerned
Though dimly till, past doubt,
'Twas a sort of throne stood out—

High seat with steps, at least:
And the topmost step was filled
By—whom? What vestured priest?
A stranger to me,—his guild,
His cult, unreconciled

To my knowledge how guild and cult
Are clothed in this world of ours:
I pondered, but no result
Came to—unless that Giaours
So worship the Lower Powers.

When suddenly who entered?
Who knelt—did you guess I saw?
Who—raising that face where centred
Allegiance to love and law
So lately—off-casting awe,

Down-treading reserve, away
Thrusting respect . . . but mine
Stands firm—firm still shall stay!
Ask Satan! for I decline
To tell—what I saw, in fine!

Yet here in the flesh you come—
Your same self, form and face,—
In the eyes, mirth still at home!
On the lips, that commonplace
Perfection of honest grace!

Yet your errand is—needs must be
To palliate—well, explain,
Expurgate in some degree
Your soul of its ugly stain.
Oh, you—the good in grain—

How was it your white took tinge?
"A mere dream"—never object!
Sleep leaves a door on hinge
Whence soul, ere our flesh suspect,
Is off and away: detect

Her vagaries when loose, who can!
Be she pranksome, be she prude,
Disguise with the day began:
With the night—ah, what ensued
From draughts of a drink hell-brewed?

Then She: "What a queer wild dream!
And perhaps the best fun is—
Myself had its fellow—I seem
Scarce awake from yet. 'Twas this—
Shall I tell you? First, a kiss!

"For the fault was just your own,—
'Tis myself expect apology:
You warned me to let alone
(Since our studies were mere philology)
That ticklish (you said) Anthology.

"So, I dreamed that I passed *exam*
Till a question posed me sore:
'Who translated this epigram
By—an author we best ignore?'
And I answered 'Hannah More'!"

BAD DREAMS. III.

This was my dream: I saw a Forest
Old as the earth, no track nor trace
Of unmade man. Thou, Soul, explorest—
Though in a trembling rapture—space
Immeasurable! Shrubs, turned trees,
Trees that touch heaven, support its frieze
Studded with sun and moon and star:
While—oh, the enormous growths that bar
Mine eye from penetrating past
Their tangled twine where lurks—nay, lives
Royally lone, some brute-type cast
I' the rough, time cancels, man forgives.

On, Soul! I saw a lucid City
Of architectural device
Every way perfect. Pause for pity,
Lightning! nor leave a cicatrice
On those bright marbles, dome and spire,
Structures palatial,—streets which mire
Dares not defile, paved all too fine
For human footstep's smirch, not thine—
Proud solitary traverser,
My Soul, of silent lengths of way—
With what ecstatic dread, aver,
Lest life start sanctioned by thy stay!

Ah, but the last sight was the hideous!
A City, yes,—a Forest, true,—
But each devouring each. Perfidious
Snake-plants had strangled what I knew
Was a pavilion once: each oak
Held on his horns some spoil he broke
By surreptitiously beneath
Upthrusting: pavements, as with teeth,
Griped huge weed widening crack and split
In squares and circles stone-work erst.
Oh, Nature—good! Oh, Art—no whit
Less worthy! Both in one—accurst!

BAD DREAMS. IV.

It happened thus: my slab, though new,
Was getting weather-stained,—beside,
Herbage, balm, peppermint o'ergrew
Letter and letter: till you tried
Somewhat, the Name was scarce descried.

That strong stern man my lover came:
—Was he my lover? Call him, pray,
My life's cold critic bent on blame
Of all poor I could do or say
To make me worth his love one day—

One far day when, by diligent
And dutiful amending faults,
Foibles, all weaknesses which went
To challenge and excuse assaults
Of culture wronged by taste that halts—
Discrepancies should mar no plan
Symmetric of the qualities
Claiming respect from—say—a man
That's strong and stern. "Once more he pries
Into me with those critic eyes!"

No question! so—"Conclude, condemn
Each failure my poor self avows!
Leave to its fate all you contemn!
There's Solomon's selected spouse:
Earth needs must hold such maids—choose them!"

Why, he was weeping! Surely gone
Sternness and strength: with eyes to ground
And voice a broken monotone—
"Only be as you were! Abound
In foibles, faults,—laugh, robed and crowned

"As Folly's veriest queen,—care I
One feather-fluff? Look pity, Love,
On prostrate me—your foot shall try
This forehead's use—mount thence above,
And reach what Heaven you dignify!"

Now, what could bring such change about?
The thought perplexed: till, following
His gaze upon the ground,—why, out
Came all the secret! So, a thing
Thus simple has deposed my king!

For, spite of weeds that strove to spoil
Plain reading on the lettered slab,
My name was clear enough—no soil
Effaced the date when one chance stab
Of scorn . . . if only ghosts might blab!

INAPPREHENSIVENESS.

We two stood simply friend-like side by side,
Viewing a twilight country far and wide,
Till she at length broke silence. "How it towers
Yonder, the ruin[1] o'er this vale of ours!

[1] Of the palace of Queen Cornaro, who, exiled from Cyprus, lived at Asolo, with Cardinal Bembo acting as Secretary.

The West's faint flare behind it so relieves
Its rugged outline—sight perhaps deceives,
Or I could almost fancy that I see
A branch wave plain—belike some wind-sown tree
Chance-rooted where a missing turret was.
What would I give for the perspective glass
At home, to make out if 'tis really so!
Has Ruskin noticed here at Asolo
That certain weed-growths on the ravaged wall
Seem" . . . something that I could not say at all,
My thought being rather—as absorbed she sent
Look onward after look from eyes distent
With longing to reach Heaven's gate left ajar—
"Oh, fancies that might be, oh, facts that are!
What of a wilding? By you stands, and may
So stand unnoticed till the Judgment Day,
One who, if once aware that your regard
Claimed what his heart holds,—woke, as from its sward
The flower, the dormant passion, so to speak—
Then what a rush of life would startling wreak
Revenge on your inapprehensive stare
While, from the ruin and the West's faint flare,
You let your eyes meet mine, touch what you term
Quietude—that's an universe in germ—
The dormant passion needing but a look
To burst into immense life!"
"No, the book
Which noticed how the wall-growths wave" said she
"Was not by Ruskin."
I said "Vernon Lee?"[1]

WHICH?

So, the three Court-ladies began
Their trial of who judged best
In esteeming the love of a man:
Who preferred with most reason was thereby confessed
Boy-Cupid's exemplary catcher and cager;
An Abbé crossed legs to decide on the wager.

First the Duchesse: "Mine for me—
Who were it but God's for Him,
And the King's for—who but he?
Both faithful and loyal, one grace more shall brim
His cup with perfection: a lady's true lover,
He holds—save his God and his king—none above her."

"I require"—outspoke the Marquise—
"Pure thoughts, ay, but also fine deeds:
Play the paladin must he, to please
My whim, and—to prove my knight's service exceeds
Your saint's and your loyalist's praying and kneeling—
Show wounds, each wide mouth to my mercy appealing."

Then the Comtesse: "My choice be a wretch,
Mere losel in body and soul,
Thrice accurst! What care I, so he stretch
Arms to me his sole saviour, love's ultimate goal,
Out of earth and men's noise—names of 'infidel,' 'traitor,'
Cast up at him? Crown me, crown's adjudicator!"

And the Abbé uncrossed his legs,
Took snuff, a reflective pinch,
Broke silence: "The question begs
Much pondering ere I pronounce. Shall I flinch?
The love which to one and one only has reference
Seems terribly like what perhaps gains God's preference."

[1] The authoress of *Euphorion* and other books (Miss Violet Paget).

THE CARDINAL AND THE DOG.

Crescenzio, the Pope's Legate at the High Council, Trent,
—Year Fifteen hundred twenty-two, March Twenty-five—intent
On writing letters to the Pope till late into the night,
Rose, weary, to refresh himself, and saw a monstrous sight:
(I give mine Author's very words: he penned, I reindite.)

A black Dog of vast bigness, eyes flaming, ears that hung
Down to the very ground almost, into the chamber sprung
And made directly for him, and laid himself right under
The table where Crescenzio wrote—who called in fear and wonder
His servants in the ante-room, commanded everyone
To look for and find out the beast: but, looking, they found none.

.

The Cardinal fell melancholy, then sick, soon after died:
And at Verona, as he lay on his death-bed, he cried
Aloud to drive away the Dog that leapt on his bed-side.
Heaven keep us Protestants from harm: the rest . . . no ill betide!

THE POPE AND THE NET.

What, he on whom our voices unanimously ran,
Made Pope at our last Conclave? Full low his life began:
His father earned the daily bread as just a fisherman.
So much the more his boy minds book, gives proof of mother-wit,
Becomes first Deacon, and then Priest, then Bishop: see him sit
No less than Cardinal ere long, while no one cries "Unfit!"

But someone smirks, some other smiles, jogs elbow and nods head:
Each winks at each: "'I-faith, a rise! Saint Peter's net, instead
Of sword and keys, is come in vogue!" You think he blushes red?

Not he, of humble holy heart! "Unworthy me!" he sighs:
"From fisher's drudge to Church's prince—it is indeed a rise:
So, here's my way to keep the fact for ever in my eyes!"

And straightway in his palace-hall, where commonly is set
Some coat-of-arms, some portraiture ancestral, lo, we met
His mean estate's reminder in his fisher-father's net!

Which step conciliates all and some, stops cavil in a trice:
"The humble holy heart that holds of new-born pride no spice!
He's just the saint to choose for Pope!" Each adds "'Tis my advice."

So, Pope he was: and when we flocked—its sacred slipper on—
To kiss his foot, we lifted eyes, alack the thing was gone—
That guarantee of lowlihead,—eclipsed that star which shone!

Each eyed his fellow, one and all kept silence. I cried "Pish!
I'll make me spokesman for the rest, express the common wish.
Why, Father, is the net removed?" "Son, it hath caught the fish."

THE BEAN-FEAST.

He was the man—Pope Sixtus, that Fifth, that swineherd's son :
He knew the right thing, did it, and thanked God when 'twas done :
But of all he had to thank for, my fancy somehow leans
To thinking, what most moved him was a certain meal on beans.

For one day, as his wont was, in just enough disguise
As he went exploring wickedness,—to see with his own eyes
If law had due observance in the city's entrail dark
As well as where, i' the open, crime stood an obvious mark,—

He chanced, in a blind alley, on a tumble-down once house
Now hovel, vilest structure in Rome the ruinous :
And, as his tact impelled him, Sixtus adventured bold,
To learn how lowliest subjects bore hunger, toil, and cold.

There sat they at high-supper—man and wife, lad and lass,
Poor as you please but cleanly all and carefree : pain that was
—Forgotten, pain as sure to be let bide aloof its time,—
Mightily munched the brave ones—what mattered gloom or grime ?

Said Sixtus "Feast, my children ! who works hard needs eat well.
I'm just a supervisor, would hear what you can tell.
Do any wrongs want righting ? The Father tries his best,
But, since he's only mortal, sends such as I to test
The truth of all that's told him—how folk like you may fare :
Come !—only don't stop eating—when mouth has words to spare—

"You"—smiled he—"play the spokesman, bell-wether of the flock !
Are times good, masters gentle ? Your grievances unlock !
How of your work and wages ?—pleasures, if such may be—
Pains, as such are for certain." Thus smiling questioned he.

But somehow, spite of smiling, awe stole upon the group—
An inexpressible surmise : why should a priest thus stoop—
Pry into what concerned folk ? Each visage fell. Aware,
Cries Sixtus interposing : "Nay, children, have no care !

"Fear nothing ! Who employs me requires the plain truth. Pelf
Beguiles who should inform me : so, I inform myself.
See !" And he threw his hood back, let the close vesture ope,
Showed face, and where on tippet the cross lay : 'twas the Pope.

Imagine the joyful wonder ! "How shall the like of us—
Poor souls—requite such blessing of our rude bean-feast ?" "Thus—
Thus amply !" laughed Pope Sixtus. "I early rise, sleep late :
Who works may eat : they tempt me, your beans there : spare a plate !"

Down sat he on the door-step : 'twas they this time said grace :
He ate up the last mouthful, wiped lips, and then, with face

Turned heavenward, broke forth thankful :
"Not now, that earth obeys
Thy word in mine, that through me the peoples know Thy ways—
But that Thy care extendeth to Nature's homely wants,
And, while man's mind is strengthened, Thy goodness nowise scants
Man's body of its comfort,—that I whom kings and queens
Crouch to, pick crumbs from off my table, relish beans!
The thunders I but seem to launch, there plain Thy hand all see:
That I have appetite, digest, and thrive—that boon's for me."

MUCKLE-MOUTH MEG.

FROWNED the Laird on the Lord : "So, red-handed I catch thee?
Death-doomed by our Law of the Border!
We've a gallows outside and a chiel to dispatch thee :
Who trespasses—hangs : all's in order."

He met frown with smile, did the young English gallant :
Then the Laird's dame : "Nay, Husband, I beg!
He's comely : be merciful! Grace for the callant
—If he marries our Muckle-mouth Meg!"

"No mile-wide-mouthed monster of yours do I marry :
Grant rather the gallows!" laughed he.
"Foul fare kith and kin of you—why do you tarry?"
"To tame your fierce temper!" quoth she.

"Shove him quick in the Hole, shut him fast for a week :
Cold, darkness and hunger work wonders :
Who lion-like roars now, mouse-fashion will squeak,
And 'it rains' soon succeed to 'it thunders.'"

A week did he bide in the cold and the dark
—Not hunger : for duly at morning
In flitted a lass, and a voice like a lark
Chirped "Muckle-mouth Meg still ye're scorning?

"Go hang, but here's parritch to hearten ye first!"
"Did Meg's muckle-mouth boast within some
Such music as yours, mine should match it or burst :
No frog-jaws! So tell folk, my Winsome!"

Soon week came to end, and, from Hole's door set wide,
Out he marched, and there waited the lassie :
"Yon gallows, or Muckle-mouth Meg for a bride!
Consider! Sky's blue and turf's grassy :

"Life's sweet : shall I say ye wed Muckle-mouth Meg?"
"Not I" quoth the stout heart : "too eerie
The mouth that can swallow a bubblyjock's[1] egg :
Shall I let it munch mine? Never, Dearie!"

"Not Muckle-mouth Meg? Wow, the obstinate man!
Perhaps he would rather wed me!"
"Ay, would he—with just for a dowry your can!"
"I'm Muckle-mouth Meg" chirruped she.

"Then so—so—so—so—" as he kissed her apace—
"Will I widen thee out till thou turnest
From Margaret Minnikin-mou', by God's grace,
To Muckle-mouth Meg in good earnest!"

[1] A turkey.

ARCADES AMBO.

A. You blame me that I ran away?
Why, Sir, the enemy advanced:
Balls flew about, and—who can say
But one, if I stood firm, had glanced
In my direction? Cowardice?
I only know we don't live twice,
Therefore—shun death, is my advice.

B. Shun death at all risks? Well, at some!
True, I myself, Sir, though I scold
The cowardly, by no means come
Under reproof as overbold
—I, who would have no end of brutes
Cut up alive to guess what suits
My case and saves my toe from shoots.

THE LADY AND THE PAINTER.

She. Yet womanhood you reverence,
So you profess!
He. With heart and soul.
She. Of which fact this is evidence!
To help Art-study,—for some dole
Of certain wretched shillings,—you
Induce a woman—virgin too—
To strip and stand stark-naked?
He. True.

She. Nor feel you so degrade her?
He. What
—(Excuse the interruption)—clings
Half-savage-like around your hat?
She. Ah, do they please you? Wild-bird-wings
Next season,—Paris-prints assert,—
We must go feathered to the skirt:
My modiste keeps on the alert.

Owls, hawks, jays—swallows most approve . . .
He. Dare I speak plainly?
She. Oh, I trust!
He. Then, Lady Blanche, it less would move
In heart and soul of me disgust
Did you strip off those spoils you wear,
And stand—for thanks, not shillings—bare,
To help Art like my Model there.
She well knew what absolved her—praise
In me for God's surpassing good,
Who granted to my reverent gaze
A type of purest womanhood.
You—clothed with murder of His best
Of harmless beings—stand the test!
What is it *you* know?
She. That you jest!

PONTE DELL' ANGELO, VENICE.

[This story is amongst the many stories told in the honour of the Virgin Mary by St. Alphonsus Liguori in "The Glories of Mary."]

Stop rowing! This one of our bye-canals
O'er a certain bridge you have to cross
That's named "Of the Angel": listen why!
The name "Of the Devil" too much appals
Venetian acquaintance, so—his the loss,
While the gain goes . . . look on high!

An angel visibly guards yon house:
Above each scutcheon—a pair—stands he,
Enfolds them with droop of either wing:
The family's fortune were perilous
Did he thence depart—you will soon agree,
If I hitch into verse the thing.

For, once on a time, this house belonged
To a lawyer of note, with law and to spare,
But also with overmuch lust of gain:
In the matter of law you were nowise wronged,
But alas for the lucre! He picked you bare
To the bone. Did folk complain?

"I exact" growled he "work's rightful due:
'Tis folk seek me, not I seek them.
Advice at its price! They succeed or fail,
Get law in each case—and a lesson too:
Keep clear of the Courts—is advice *ad rem*:
They'll remember, I'll be bail!"

So, he pocketed fee without a qualm.
What reason for squeamishness? Labour done,
To play he betook him with lightened heart,
Ate, drank and made merry with song or psalm,
Since the yoke of the Church is an easy one—
Fits neck nor causes smart.

Brief: never was such an extortionate
Rascal—the word has escaped my teeth
And yet—(all's down in a book no ass
Indited, believe me!)—this reprobate
Was punctual at prayer-time: gold lurked beneath
Alloy of the rankest brass.

For, play the extortioner as he might,
Fleece folk each day and all day long,
There was this redeeming circumstance:
He never lay down to sleep at night
But he put up a prayer first, brief yet strong,
"Our Lady avert mischance!"

Now it happened at close of a fructuous week,
"I must ask" quoth he "some Saint to dine:
I want that widow well out of my ears
With her ailing and wailing. Who bade her seek
Redress at my hands? 'She was wronged!' Folk whine
If to Law wrong right appears.

"Matteo da Bascio—he's my man!
No less than Chief of the Capucins:
His presence will surely suffumigate
My house—fools think lies under a ban
If somebody loses what somebody wins.
Hark, there he knocks at the grate!

"Come in, thou blessed of Mother Church!
I go and prepare—to bid, that is,
My trusty and diligent servitor
Get all things in readiness. Vain the search
Through Venice for one to compare with this
My model of ministrants: for—

"For—once again, nay, three times over,
My helpmate's an ape! so intelligent,
I train him to drudge at household work:
He toils and he moils, I live in clover:
Oh, you shall see! There's a goodly scent—
From his cooking, or I'm a Turk!

"Scarce need to descend and supervise:
I'll do it, however: wait here awhile!"
So, down to the kitchen gaily scuttles
Our host, nor notes the alarmed surmise
Of the holy man. "O depth of guile!
He blindly guzzles and guttles,

"While—who is it dresses the food and pours
The liquor? Some fiend—I make no doubt—
In likeness of—which of the loathly brutes?
An ape! Where hides he? No bull that gores,
No bear that hugs—'tis the mock and flout
Of an ape, fiend's face that suits.

"So—out with thee, creature, wherever thou hidest!
I charge thee, by virtue of . . . right do I judge!
There skulks he perdue, crouching under the bed.
Well done! What, forsooth, in beast's shape thou confidest?
I know and would name thee but that I begrudge
Breath spent on such carrion. Instead—

"I adjure thee by——" "Stay!" laughed the portent that rose
From floor up to ceiling: "No need to adjure!
See Satan in person, late ape by command
Of Him thou adjurest in vain. A saint's nose
Scents brimstone though incense be burned for a lure.
Yet, hence! for I'm safe, understand!

"'Tis my charge to convey to fit punishment's place
This lawyer, my liegeman, for cruelty wrought
On his clients, the widow and orphan, poor souls
He has plagued by exactions which proved law's disgrace,
Made equity void and to nothingness brought
God's pity. Fiends, on with fresh coals!"

"Stay!" nowise confounded, withstands Hell its match:
"How comes it, were truth in this story of thine,
God's punishment suffered a minute's delay?
Weeks, months have elapsed since thou squattedst at watch
For a spring on thy victim: what caused thee decline
Advantage till challenged to-day?"

"That challenge I meet with contempt," quoth the fiend.
"Thus much I acknowledge: the man's armed in mail:
I wait till a joint's loose, then quick ply my claws.
Thy friend's one good custom—he knows not—has screened
His flesh hitherto from what else would assail:
At "Save me, Madonna!" I pause.

"That prayer did the losel but once pretermit,
My pounce were upon him. I keep me attent:
He's in safety but till he's caught napping. Enough!"
"Ay, enough!" smiles the saint—"for the biter is bit,
The spy caught in somnolence. Vanish! I'm sent
To smooth up what fiends do in rough."

"I vanish? Through wall or through roof?" the ripost
Grinned gaily. "My orders were—'Leave not unharmed
The abode of this lawyer! Do damage to prove
'Twas for something thou quittedst the land of the lost—
To add to their number this unit!' Though charmed
From descent there, on earth that's above

"I may haply amerce him." "So do, and begone,
I command thee! For, look! Though there's doorway behind
And window before thee, go straight through the wall,
Leave a breach in the brickwork, a gap in the stone
For who passes to stare at!" "Spare speech! I'm resigned:
Here goes!" roared the goblin, as all—

Wide bat-wings, spread arms and legs, tail out a-stream,
Crash obstacles went, right and left, as he soared
Or else sank, was clean gone through the hole anyhow.
The Saint returned thanks: then a satisfied gleam
On the bald polished pate showed that triumph was scored.
"To dinner with appetite now!"

Down he trips. "In good time!" smirks the host. "Didst thou scent
Rich savour of roast meat? Where hides he, my ape?
Look alive, be alert! He's away to wash plates.
Sit down, Saint! What's here? Dost examine a rent
In the napkin thou twistest and twirlest? Agape . . .
Ha, blood is it drips nor abates

"From thy wringing a cloth, late was lavendered fair?
What means such a marvel?" "Just this does it mean:
I convince and convict thee of sin!" answers straight

The Saint, wringing on, wringing ever—O rare!—
Blood—blood from a napery snow not more clean.
"A miracle shows thee thy state!

"See—blood thy extortions have wrung from the flesh
Of thy clients who, sheep-like, arrived to be shorn
And left thee—or fleeced to the quick or so flayed
That, behold, their blood gurgles and grumbles afresh
To accuse thee! Ay, down on thy knees, get up sworn
To restore! Restitution once made,

"Sin no more! Dost thou promise? Absolved, then, arise!
Upstairs follow me! Art amazed at yon breach?
Who battered and shattered and scattered, escape
From thy purlieus obtaining? That Father of Lies
Thou wast wont to extol for his feats, all and each
The Devil's disguised as thine ape!"

Be sure that our lawyer was torn by remorse,
Shed tears in a flood, vowed and swore so to alter
His ways that how else could our Saint but declare
He was cleansed of past sin? "For sin future—fare worse
Thou undoubtedly wilt," warned the Saint, "shouldst thou falter
One whit!" "Oh, for that have no care!

"I am firm in my purposed amendment. But, prithee,
Must ever affront and affright me yon gap?
Who made it for exit may find it of use
For entrance as easy. If, down in his smithy
He forges me fetters—when heated, mayhap,
He'll up with an armful! Broke loose—

"How bar him out henceforth?" "Judiciously urged!"
Was the good man's reply. "How to baulk him is plain.
There's nothing the Devil objects to so much,
So speedily flies from, as one of those purged
Of his presence, the angels who erst formed his train—
His, their emperor. Choose one of such!

"Get fashioned his likeness and set him on high
At back of the breach thus adroitly filled up:
Display him as guard of two scutcheons, thy arms:
I warrant no devil attempts to get by
And disturb thee so guarded. Eat, drink, dine and sup
In thy rectitude, safe from alarms!"

So said and so done. See, the angel has place
Where the Devil had passage! All's down in a book.
Gainsay me? Consult it! Still faithless? Trust *me?*
Trust Father Boverio who gave me the case
In his Annals—gets of it, by hook or by crook,
Two confirmative witnesses: three

Are surely enough to establish an act:
And thereby we learn—would we ascertain truth—
To trust wise tradition which took, at the time,
Note that served till slow history ventured on fact,
Though folk have their fling at tradition forsooth!
Row, boys, fore and aft, rhyme and chime!

BEATRICE SIGNORINI.

[Beatrice was a Roman lady married to the painter Romanelli, who after his marriage fell in love with a famous lady painter, Artemisia Gentileschi, a pupil of Guido's. Baldinucci tells the story Browning repeats.]

THIS strange thing happened to a painter once:
Viterbo boasts the man among her sons
Of note, I seem to think: his ready tool
Picked up its precepts in Cortona's school—
That's Pietro Berretini, whom they call
Cortona, these Italians: greatish-small,
Our painter was his pupil, by repute
His match if not his master absolute,
Though whether he spoiled fresco more or less,
And what's its fortune, scarce repays your guess.
Still, for one circumstance, I save his name
—Francesco Romanelli: do the same!
He went to Rome and painted: there he knew
A wonder of a woman painting too—
For she, at least, was no Cortona's drudge:
Witness that ardent fancy-shape—I judge
A semblance of her soul—she called "Desire"
With starry front for guide, where sits the fire
She left to brighten Buonarroti's house.
If you see Florence, pay that piece your vows,
Though blockhead Baldinucci's mind, imbued
With monkish morals, bade folk "Drape the nude
And stop the scandal!" quoth the record prim
I borrow this of: hang his book and him!
At Rome, then, where these fated ones met first,
The blossom of his life had hardly burst
While hers was blooming at full beauty's stand:
No less Francesco—when half-ripe he scanned
Consummate Artemisia—grew one want
To have her his and make her ministrant
With every gift of body and of soul
To him. In vain. Her sphery self was whole—
Might only touch his orb at Art's sole point.
Suppose he could persuade her to enjoint
Her life—past, present, future—all in his
At Art's sole point by some explosive kiss
Of love through lips, would love's success defeat
Artistry's haunting curse—the Incomplete?
Artists no doubt they both were,—what beside
Was she? who, long had felt heart, soul spread wide
Her life out, knowing much and loving well,
On either side Art's narrow space where fell
Reflection from his own speck: but the germ
Of individual genius—what we term
The very self, the God-gift whence had grown
Heart's life and soul's life,—how make that his own?
Vainly his Art, reflected, smiled in small
On Art's one facet of her ampler ball;
The rest, touch-free, took in, gave back heaven, earth,
All where he was not. Hope, well-nigh ere birth
Came to Desire, died off all-unfulfilled.
"What though in Art I stand the abler-skilled,"
(So he conceited: mediocrity
Turns on itself the self-transforming eye)
"If only Art were suing, mine would plead
To purpose: man—by nature I exceed
Woman the bounded: but how much beside
She boasts, would sue in turn and be denied!
Love her? My own wife loves me in a sort
That suits us both: she takes the world's report
Of what my work is worth, and, for the rest,
Concedes that, while his consort keeps her nest,
The eagle soars a licensed vagrant, lives
A wide free life which she at least forgives—
Good Beatricé Signorini! Well
And wisely did I choose her. But the spell
To subjugate this Artemisia—where?
She passionless?—she resolute to care
Nowise beyond the plain sufficiency
Of fact that she is she and I am I
—Acknowledged arbitrator for us both
In her life as in mine which she were loth

Even to learn the laws of? No, and no
Twenty times over! Ay, it must be so:
I for myself, alas!"
Whereon, instead
Of the checked lover's-utterance—why, he said
—Leaning above her easel: "Flesh is red"
(Or some such just remark)—"by no means white
As Guido's practice teaches: you are right."
Then came the better impulse: "What if pride
Were wisely trampled on, whate'er betide?
If I grow hers, not mine—join lives, confuse
Bodies and spirits, gain not her but lose
Myself to Artemisia? That were love!
Of two souls—one must bend, one rule above:
If I crouch under proudly, lord turned slave,
Were it not worthier both than if she gave
Herself—in treason to herself—to me?"

And, all the while, he felt it could not be.
Such love were true love: love that way who can!
Someone that's born half woman not whole man:
For man, prescribed man better or man worse,
Why, whether microcosm or universe,
What law prevails alike through great and small,
The world and man—world's miniature we call?
Male is the master. "That way"—smiled and sighed
Our true male estimator—"puts her pride
My wife in making me the outlet whence
She learns all Heaven allows: 'tis my pretence
To paint: her lord should do what else but paint?
Do I break brushes, cloister me turned saint?
Then, best of all suits sanctity her spouse
Who acts for Heaven, allows and disallows
At pleasure, past appeal, the right, the wrong
In all things. That's my wife's way. But this strong
Confident Artemisia—an adept
In Art does she conceit herself? 'Except
In just this instance,' tell her, 'no one draws
More rigidly observant of the laws
Of right design: yet here,—permit me hint,—
If the acromion had a deeper dint,
That shoulder were perfection.' What surprise
—Nay scorn, shoots black fire from those startled eyes!
She to be lessoned in design forsooth!
I'm doomed and done for, since I spoke the truth.
Make my own work the subject of dispute—
Fails it of just perfection absolute
Somewhere? Those motors, flexors,—don't I know
Ser Santi, styled 'Tirititototo
The pencil-prig,' might blame them? Yet my wife—
Were he and his nicknamer brought to life,
Tito and Titian, to pronounce again—
Ask her who knows more—I or the great Twain
Our colourist and draughtsman!
"I help her,
Not she helps me; and neither shall demur
Because my portion is——" he chose to think—
"Quite other than a woman's: I may drink
At many waters, must repose by none—
Rather arise and fare forth, having done
Duty to one new excellence the more,
Abler thereby, though impotent before
So much was gained of knowledge. Best depart
From this last lady I have learned by heart!"

Thus he concluded of himself—resigned
To play the man and master: "Man boasts mind:
Woman, man's sport calls mistress, to the same
Does body's suit and service. Would she claim
—My placid Beatricé-wife—pretence
Even to blame her lord if, going hence,
He wistfully regards one whom—did fate
Concede—he might accept queen, abdicate

Kingship because of?—one of no meek sort
But masterful as he: man's match in short?
Oh, there's no secret I were best conceal!
Bicé shall know; and should a stray tear steal
From out the blue eye, stain the rose cheek
—bah!
A smile, a word's gay reassurance—ah,
With kissing interspersed,—shall make
amends,
Turn pain to pleasure."
"What, in truth so ends
Abruptly, do you say, our intercourse?"
Next day, asked Artemisia: "I'll divorce
Husband and wife no longer. Go your ways,
Leave Rome! Viterbo owns no equal, says
The bye-word, for fair women: you, no
doubt,
May boast a paragon all specks without,
Using the painter's privilege to choose
Among what's rarest. Will your wife refuse
Acceptance from—no rival—of a gift?
You paint the human figure I make shift
Humbly to reproduce: but, in my hours
Of idlesse, what I fain would paint is—
flowers.
Look now!"
She twitched aside a veiling cloth.
"Here is my keepsake—frame and picture
both:
For see, the frame is all of flowers festooned
About an empty space,—left thus, to wound
No natural susceptibility:
How can I guess? 'Tis you must fill, not I,
The central space with—her whom you like
best!
That is your business, mine has been the rest.
But judge!"
How judge them? Each of us,
in flowers,
Chooses his love, allies it with past hours,
Old meetings, vanished forms and faces:
no—
Here let each favourite unmolested blow
For one heart's homage, no tongue's banal
praise,
Whether the rose appealingly bade "Gaze
Your fill on me, sultana who dethrone
The gaudy tulip!" or 'twas "Me alone
Rather do homage to, who lily am,
No unabashed rose!" "Do I vainly cram
My cup with sweets, your jonquil?" "Why
forget
Vernal endearments with the violet?"
So they contested yet concerted, all
As one, to circle round about, enthral
Yet, self-forgetting, push to prominence
The midmost wonder, gained no matter
whence.

There's a tale extant, in a book I conned
Long years ago, which treats of things beyond
The common, antique times and countries
queer
And customs strange to match. "'Tis said,
last year,"
(Recounts my author,) "that the King had
mind
To view his kingdom—guessed at from behind
A palace-window hitherto. Announced
No sooner was such purpose than 'twas
pounced
Upon by all the ladies of the land—
Loyal but light of life: they formed a band
Of loveliest ones but lithest also, since
Proudly they all combined to bear their prince.
Backs joined to breasts,—arms, legs,—nay,
ankles, wrists,
Hands, feet, I know not by what turns and
twists,
So interwoven lay that you believed
'Twas one sole beast of burden which received
The monarch on its back, of breadth not scant
Since fifty girls made one white elephant."
So with the fifty flowers which shapes and hues
Blent, as I tell, and made one fast yet loose
Mixture of beauties, composite, distinct
No less in each combining flower that linked
With flower to form a fit environment
For—whom might be the painter's heart's
intent
Thus, in the midst enhaloed, to enshrine?

"This glory-guarded middle space—is mine?
For me to fill?"
"For you, my Friend! We part,
Never perchance to meet again. Your Art—

What if I mean it—so to speak—shall wed
My own, be witness of the life we led
When sometimes it has seemed our souls near found
Each one the other as its mate—unbound
Had yours been haply from the better choice
—Beautiful Bicé: 'tis the common voice,
The crowning verdict. Make whom you like best
Queen of the central space, and manifest
Your predilection for what flower beyond
All flowers finds favour with you. I am fond
Of—say—yon rose's rich predominance,
While you—what wonder?—more affect the glance
The gentler violet from its leafy screen
Ventures: so—choose your flower and paint your queen!"

Oh but the man was ready, head as hand,
Instructed and adroit. "Just as you stand,
Stay and be made—would Nature but relent—
By Art immortal!"
Every implement
In tempting reach—a palette primed, each squeeze
Of oil-paint in its proper patch—with these,
Brushes, a veritable sheaf to grasp!
He worked as he had never dared.
"Unclasp
My Art from yours who can!"—he cried at length,
As down he threw the pencil—"Grace from Strength
Dissociate, from your flowery fringe detach
My face of whom it frames,—the feat will match
What that of Time should Time from me extract
Your memory, Artemisia!" And in fact,—
What with the pricking impulse, sudden glow
Of soul—head, hand co-operated so
That face was worthy of its frame, 'tis said—
Perfect, suppose!
They parted. Soon instead
Of Rome was home,—of Artemisia—well,
The placid-perfect wife. And it befell
That after the first incontestably
Blessedest of all blisses (—wherefore try
Your patience with embracings and the rest
Due from Calypso's all-unwilling guest
To his Penelope?)—there somehow came
The coolness which as duly follows flame.
So, one day, "What if we inspect the gifts
My Art has gained us?"
Now the wife uplifts
A casket-lid, now tries a medal's chain
Round her own lithe neck, fits a ring in vain
—Too loose on the fine finger,—vows and swears
The jewel with two pendent pearls like pears
Betters a lady's bosom—witness else!
And so forth, while Ulysses smiles.
"Such spells
Subdue such natures—sex must worship toys
—Trinkets and trash: yet, ah, quite other joys
Must stir from sleep the passionate abyss
Of—such an one as her I know—not this
My gentle consort with the milk for blood!
Why, did it chance that in a careless mood
(In those old days, gone—never to return—
When we talked—she to teach and I to learn)
I dropped a word, a hint which might imply
Consorts exist—how quick flashed fire from eye,
Brow blackened, lip was pinched by furious lip!
I needed no reminder of my slip:
One warning taught me wisdom. Whereas here . . .
Aha, a sportive fancy! Eh, what fear
Of harm to follow? Just a whim indulged!

"My Beatricé, there's an undivulged
Surprise in store for you: the moment's fit
For letting loose a secret: out with it!
Tributes to worth, you rightly estimate
These gifts of Prince and Bishop, Church and State:
Yet, may I tell you? Tastes so disagree!
There's one gift, preciousest of all to me,
I doubt if you would value as well worth
The obvious sparkling gauds that men unearth

For toy-cult mainly of you womankind ;
Such make you marvel, I concede : while blind
The sex proves to the greater marvel here
I veil to baulk its envy. Be sincere !
Say, should you search creation far and wide,
Was ever face like this ? "

He drew aside
The veil, displayed the flower-framed portrait kept
For private delectation.
No adept
In florist's lore more accurately named
And praised or, as appropriately, blamed
Specimen after specimen of skill,
Than Bicé. " Rightly placed the daffodil—
Scarcely so right the blue germander. Grey
Good mouse-ear ! Hardly your auricula
Is powdered white enough. It seems to me
Scarlet not crimson, that anemone :
But there's amends in the pink saxifrage.
O darling dear ones, let me disengage
You innocents from what your harmlessness
Clasps lovingly ! Out thou from their caress,
Serpent ! "
Whereat forth-flashing from her coils
On coils of hair, the *spilla* in its toils
Of yellow wealth, the dagger-plaything kept
To pin its plaits together, life-like leapt
And—woe to all inside the coronal !
Stab followed stab,—cut, slash, she ruined all
The masterpiece. Alack for eyes and mouth
And dimples and endearment—North and South,
East, West, the tatters in a fury flew :
There yawned the circlet. What remained to do ?
She flung the weapon, and, with folded arms
And mien defiant of such low alarms
As death and doom beyond death, Bicé stood
Passively statuesque, in quietude
Awaiting judgment.
And out judgment burst
With frank unloading of love's laughter, first
Freed from its unsuspected source. Some throe
Must needs unlock love's prison-bars, let flow
The joyance.

" Then you ever were, still are,
And henceforth shall be—no occulted star
But my resplendent Bicé, sun-revealed,
Full-rondure ! Woman-glory unconcealed,
So front me, find and claim and take your own—
My soul and body yours and yours alone,
As you are mine, mine wholly ! Heart's love, take—
Use your possession—stab or stay at will
Here—hating, saving—woman with the skill
To make man beast or god ! "
And so it proved :
For, as beseemed new godship, thus he loved,
Past power to change, until his dying-day,—
Good fellow ! And I fain would hope—some say
Indeed for certain—that our painter's toils
At fresco-splashing, finer stroke in oils,
Were not so mediocre after all ;
Perhaps the work appears unduly small
From having loomed too large in old esteem,
Patronized by late Papacy. I seem
Myself to have cast eyes on certain work
In sundry galleries, no judge needs shirk
From moderately praising. He designed
Correctly, nor in colour lagged behind
His age : but both in Florence and in Rome
The elder race so make themselves at home
That scarce we give a glance to ceilingfuls
Of such like as Francesco. Still, one culls
From out the heaped laudations of the time
The pretty incident I put in rhyme.

FLUTE-MUSIC, WITH AN ACCOMPANIMENT.

He. Ah, the bird-like fluting
Through the ash-tops yonder—
Bullfinch-bubblings, soft sounds suiting
What sweet thoughts, I wonder ?
Fine-pearled notes that surely
Gather, dewdrop-fashion,
Deep-down in some heart which purely
Secrets globuled passion—

Passion insuppressive—
Such is piped, for certain;
Love, no doubt, nay, love excessive
'Tis, your ash-tops curtain.

Would your ash-tops open
We might spy the player—
Seek and find some sense which no pen
Yet from singer, sayer,
Ever has extracted:
Never, to my knowledge,
Yet has pedantry enacted
That, in Cupid's College,
Just this variation
Of the old old yearning
Should by plain speech have salvation,
Yield new men new learning.

"Love!" but what love, nicely
New from old disparted,
Would the player teach precisely?
First of all, he started
In my brain Assurance—
Trust—entire Contentment—
Passion proved by much endurance;
Then came—not resentment,
No, but simply Sorrow:
What was seen had vanished:
Yesterday so blue! To-morrow
Blank, all sunshine banished.

Hark! 'Tis Hope resurges,
Struggling through obstruction—
Forces a poor smile which verges
On Joy's introduction.
Now, perhaps, mere Musing:
"Holds earth such a wonder?
Fairy-mortal, soul-sense-fusing
Past thought's power to sunder!"
What? calm Acquiescence?
"Daisied turf gives room to
Trefoil, plucked once in her presence—
Growing by her tomb too!"

She. All's your fancy-spinning!
Here's the fact: a neighbour
Never-ending, still beginning,
Recreates his labour:
Deep o'er desk he drudges,
Adds, divides, subtracts and
Multiplies, until he judges
Noonday-hour's exact sand
Shows the hourglass emptied:
Then comes lawful leisure,
Minutes rare from toil exempted,
Fit to spend in pleasure.

Out then with—what treatise?
Youth's Complete Instructor
How to play the Flute. Quid petis?
Follow Youth's conductor
On and on, through *Easy*,
Up to *Harder*, *Hardest*
Flute-piece, till thou, flautist wheezy,
Possibly discardest
Tootlings hoarse and husky,
Mayst expend with courage
Breath—on tunes once bright now dusky—
Meant to cool thy porridge.

That's an air of Tulou's
He maltreats persistent,
Till as lief I'd hear some Zulu's
Bone-piped bag, breath-distent,
Madden native dances.
I'm the man's familiar:
Unexpectedness enhances
What your ear's auxiliar
—Fancy—finds suggestive.
Listen! That's *legato*
Rightly played, his fingers restive
Touch as if *staccato*.

He. Ah, you trick-betrayer!
Telling tales, unwise one?
So the secret of the player
Was—he could surprise one
Well-nigh into trusting
Here was a musician
Skilled consummately, yet lusting
Through no vile ambition
After making captive
All the world,—rewarded
Amply by one stranger's rapture,
Common praise discarded.

So, without assistance
Such as music rightly
Needs and claims,—defying distance,
Overleaping lightly
Obstacles which hinder,—
He, for my approval,
All the same and all the kinder
Made mine what might move all
Earth to kneel adoring:
Took—while he piped Gounod's
Bit of passionate imploring—
Me for Juliet: who knows?

No! as you explain things,
All's mere repetition,
Practise-pother: of all vain things
Why waste pooh or pish on
Toilsome effort—never
Ending, still beginning—
After what should pay endeavour
—Right-performance? winning
Weariness from you who,
Ready to admire some
Owl's fresh hooting—Tu-whit, tu-who—
Find stale thrush-songs tiresome.

She. Songs, Spring thought perfection,
Summer criticizes:
What in May escaped detection,
August, past surprises,
Notes, and names each blunder.
You, the just-initiate,
Praise to heart's content (what wonder?)
Tootings I hear vitiate
Romeo's serenading—
I who, times full twenty,
Turned to ice—no ash-tops aiding—
At his *caldamente*.

So, 'twas distance altered
Sharps to flats? The missing
Bar when syncopation faltered
(You thought—paused for kissing!)
Ash-tops too felonious
Intercepted? Rather
Say—they well-nigh made euphonious
Discord, helped to gather
Phrase, by phrase, turn patches
Into simulated
Unity which botching matches,—
Scraps redintegrated.

He. Sweet, are you suggestive
Of an old suspicion
Which has always found me restive
To its admonition
When it ventured whisper
"Fool, the strifes and struggles
Of your trembler—blusher—lisper
Were so many juggles,
Tricks tried—oh, so often!—
Which once more do duty,
Find again a heart to soften,
Soul to snare with beauty."

Birth-blush of the briar-rose,
Mist-bloom of the hedge-sloe,
Someone gains the prize: admire rose
Would he, when noon's wedge—slow—
Sure, has pushed, expanded
Rathe pink to raw redness?
Would he covet sloe when sanded
By road-dust to deadness?
So—restore their value!
Ply a water-sprinkle!
Then guess sloe is fingered, shall you?
Find in rose a wrinkle?

Here what played Aquarius?
Distance—ash-tops aiding,
Reconciled scraps else contrarious,
Brightened stuff fast fading.
Distance—call your shyness:
Was the fair one peevish?
Coyness softened out of slyness.
Was she cunning, thievish,
All-but-proved impostor?
Bear but one day's exile,
Ugly traits were wholly lost or
Screened by fancies flexile—

Ash-tops these, you take me?
Fancies' interference
Changed . . .
But since I sleep, don't wake me!
What if all's appearance?
Is not outside seeming
Real as substance inside?
Both are facts, so leave me dreaming:
If who loses wins I'd
Ever lose,—conjecture,
From one phrase trilled deftly,
All the piece. So, end your lecture,
Let who lied be left lie!

"IMPERANTE AUGUSTO NATUS EST——"

WHAT it was struck the terror into me?
This, Publius: closer! while we wait our turn
I'll tell you. Water's warm (they ring inside)
At the eighth hour, till when no use to bathe.

Here in the vestibule where now we sit,
One scarce stood yesterday, the throng was such
Of loyal gapers, folk all eye and ear
While Lucius Varius Rufus[1] in their midst
Read out that long-planned late-completed piece,
His Panegyric on the Emperor.
"Nobody like him" little Flaccus[2] laughed
"At leading forth an Epos with due pomp!
Only, when godlike Cæsar swells the theme,
How should mere mortals hope to praise aright?
Tell me, thou offshoot of Etruscan kings!"
Whereat Mæcenas smiling sighed assent.

I paid my quadrans,[3] left the Thermæ's roar
Of rapture as the poet asked "What place
Among the godships Jove, for Cæsar's sake,
Would bid its actual occupant vacate
In favour of the new divinity?"
And got the expected answer "Yield thine own!"—
Jove thus dethroned, I somehow wanted air,
And found myself a-pacing street and street,
Letting the sunset, rosy over Rome,
Clear my head dizzy with the hubbub—say
As if thought's dance therein had kicked up dust
By trampling on all else: the world lay prone,
As—poet-propped, in brave hexameters—
Their subject triumphed up from man to God.
Caius Octavius Cæsar the August—
Where was escape from his prepotency?
I judge I may have passed—how many piles
Of structure dropt like doles from his free hand
To Rome on every side? Why, right and left,
For temples you've the Thundering Jupiter,
Avenging Mars, Apollo Palatine:
How count Piazza, Forum—there's a third
All but completed. You've the Theatre
Named of Marcellus—all his work, such work!—
One thought still ending, dominating all—
With warrant Varius sang "Be Cæsar God!"
By what a hold arrests he Fortune's wheel,
Obtaining and retaining heaven and earth
Through Fortune, if you like, but favour—no!
For the great deeds flashed by me, fast and thick
As stars which storm the sky on autumn nights—
Those conquests! but peace crowned them, —so, of peace!
Count up his titles only—these, in few—
Ten years Triumvir, Consul thirteen times,
Emperor, nay—the glory topping all—
Hailed Father of his Country, last and best
Of titles, by himself accepted so:
And why not? See but feats achieved in Rome—
Not to say, Italy—he planted there
Some thirty colonies—but Rome itself

[1] Poet and friend of Virgil. [2] Horace.
[3] Roman coin of small value.

All new-built, "marble now, brick once," he boasts:
This Portico, that Circus. Would you sail?
He has drained Tiber for you: would you walk?
He straightened out the long Flaminian Way.
Poor? Profit by his score of donatives!
Rich — that is, mirthful? Half-a-hundred games
Challenge your choice! There's Rome—for you and me
Only? The centre of the world besides!
For, look the wide world over, where ends Rome?
To sunrise? There's Euphrates—all between!
To sunset? Ocean and immensity:
North,—stare till Danube stops you: South, see Nile,
The Desert and the earth-upholding Mount.
Well may the poet-people each with each
Vie in praise, our company of swans,
Virgil and Horace, singers—in their way—
Nearly as good as Varius, though less famed:
Well may they cry, "No mortal, plainly God!"

Thus to myself myself said, while I walked:
Or would have said, could thought attain to speech,
Clean baffled by enormity of bliss
The while I strove to scale its heights and sound
Its depths—this masterdom o'er all the world
Of one who was but born,—like you, like me,
Like all the world he owns,—of flesh and blood.
But he—how grasp, how gauge his own conceit
Of bliss to me near inconceivable?
Or—since such flight too much makes reel the brain—
Let's sink—and so take refuge, as it were,
From life's excessive altitude—to life's
Breathable wayside shelter at its base!
If looms thus large this Cæsar to myself
—Of senatorial rank and somebody—
How must he strike the vulgar nameless crowd,
Innumerous swarm that's nobody at all?
Why,—for an instance,—much as yon gold shape
Crowned, sceptred, on the temple opposite—
Fulgurant Jupiter—must daze the sense
Of—say, yon outcast begging from its step!
What, anti-Cæsar, monarch in the mud,
As he is pinnacled above thy pate?
Ay, beg away! thy lot contrasts full well
With his whose bounty yields thee this support—
Our Holy and Inviolable One,
Cæsar, whose bounty built the fane above!
Dost read my thought? Thy garb, alack, displays
Sore usage truly in each rent and stain—
Faugh! Wash though in Suburra![1] 'Ware the dogs
Who may not so disdain a meal on thee!
What, stretchest forth a palm to catch my alms?
Aha, why yes: I must appear—who knows?—
I, in my toga, to thy rags and thee—
Quæstor—nay, Ædile, Censor—Pol! perhaps
The very City-Prætor's noble self!
As to me Cæsar, so to thee am I?
Good: nor in vain shall prove thy quest, poor rogue!
Hither—hold palm out—take this quarter-as!

And who did take it? As he raised his head,
(My gesture was a trifle—well, abrupt),
Back fell the broad flap of the peasant's-hat,
The homespun cloak that muffled half his cheek
Dropped somewhat, and I had a glimpse—just one!
One was enough. Whose—whose might be the face?
That unkempt careless hair — brown, yellowish—
Those sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows' ridge
(Each meets each, and the hawk-nose rules between)

[1] Street of ill-repute in Rome.

—That was enough, no glimpse was needed more!
And terrifyingly into my mind
Came that quick-hushed report was whispered us,
"They do say, once a year in sordid garb
He plays the mendicant, sits all day long,
Asking and taking alms of who may pass,
And so averting, if submission help,
Fate's envy, the dread chance and change of things
When Fortune—for a word, a look, a nought—
Turns spiteful and—the petted lioness—
Strikes with her sudden paw, and prone falls each
Who patted late her neck superiorly,
Or trifled with those claw-tips velvet-sheathed."
"He's God!" shouts Lucius Varius Rufus: "Man
And worms'-meat any moment!" mutters low
Some Power, admonishing the mortal-born.

Ay, do you mind? There's meaning in the fact
That whoso conquers, triumphs, enters Rome,
Climbing the Capitolian, soaring thus
To glory's summit,—Publius, do you mark—
Ever the same attendant who, behind,
Above the Conqueror's head supports the crown
All-too-demonstrative for human wear,
—One hand's employment—all the while reserves
Its fellow, backward flung, to point how, close
Appended from the car, beneath the foot
Of the up-borne exulting Conqueror,
Frown—half-descried—the instruments of shame,
The malefactor's due. Crown, now—Cross, when?

Who stands secure? Are even Gods so safe?
Jupiter that just now is dominant—
Are not there ancient dismal tales how once
A predecessor reigned ere Saturn came,
And who can say if Jupiter be last?
Was it for nothing the grey Sibyl wrote
"Cæsar Augustus regnant, shall be born
In blind Judæa"—one to master him,
Him and the universe? An old-wife's tale?

Bath-drudge! Here, slave! No cheating! Our turn next.
No loitering, or be sure you taste the lash!
Two strigils,[1] two oil-drippers, each a sponge!

DEVELOPMENT.

My Father was a scholar and knew Greek.
When I was five years old, I asked him once
"What do you read about?"
"The siege of Troy."
"What is a siege and what is Troy?"
Whereat
He piled up chairs and tables for a town,
Set me a-top for Priam, called our cat
—Helen, enticed away from home (he said)
By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close
Under the footstool, being cowardly,
But whom—since she was worth the pains, poor puss—
Towzer and Tray,—our dogs, the Atreidai,—sought
By taking Troy to get possession of
—Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,
(My pony in the stable)—forth would prance
And put to flight Hector—our page-boy's self.
This taught me who was who and what was what:
So far I rightly understood the case
At five years old: a huge delight it proved
And still proves—thanks to that instructor sage
My Father, who knew better than turn straight
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,

[1] A flesh-brush.

Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind,
Content with darkness and vacuity.

It happened, two or three years afterward,
That—I and playmates playing at Troy's Siege—
My Father came upon our make-believe.
"How would you like to read yourself the tale
Properly told, of which I gave you first
Merely such notion as a boy could bear?
Pope, now, would give you the precise account
Of what, some day, by dint of scholarship,
You'll hear—who knows?—from Homer's very mouth.
Learn Greek by all means, read the 'Blind Old Man,
Sweetest of Singers'—*tuphlos* which means 'blind,'
Hedistos which means 'sweetest.' Time enough!
Try, anyhow, to master him some day;
Until when, take what serves for substitute,
Read Pope, by all means!"
So I ran through Pope,
Enjoyed the tale—what history so true?
Also attacked my Primer, duly drudged,
Grew fitter thus for what was promised next—
The very thing itself, the actual words,
When I could turn—say, Buttmann to account.

Time passed, I ripened somewhat: one fine day,
"Quite ready for the Iliad, nothing less?
There's Heine, where the big books block the shelf:
Don't skip a word, thumb well the Lexicon!"

I thumbed well and skipped nowise till I learned
Who was who, what was what, from Homer's tongue,
And there an end of learning. Had you asked
The all-accomplished scholar, twelve years old,
"Who was it wrote the Iliad?"—what a laugh!
"Why, Homer, all the world knows: of his life
Doubtless some facts exist: it's everywhere:
We have not settled, though, his place of birth:
He begged, for certain, and was blind beside:
Seven cities claimed him—Scio, with best right,
Thinks Byron. What he wrote? Those Hymns we have.
Then there's the 'Battle of the Frogs and Mice,'
That's all—unless they dig 'Margites' up
(I'd like that) nothing more remains to know."

Thus did youth spend a comfortable time;
Until—"What's this the Germans say is fact
That Wolf found out first? It's unpleasant work
Their chop and change, unsettling one's belief:
All the same, while we live, we learn, that's sure."
So, I bent brow o'er *Prolegomena*.
And, after Wolf, a dozen of his like
Proved there was never any Troy at all,
Neither Besiegers nor Besieged,—nay, worse,—
No actual Homer, no authentic text,
No warrant for the fiction I, as fact,
Had treasured in my heart and soul so long—
Ay, mark you! and as fact held still, still hold,
Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts
And soul of souls, fact's essence freed and fixed
From accidental fancy's guardian sheath.
Assuredly thenceforward—thank my stars!—
However it got there, deprive who could—
Wring from the shrine my precious tenantry,
Helen, Ulysses, Hector and his Spouse,
Achilles and his Friend?—though Wolf—ah, Wolf!
Why must he needs come doubting, spoil a dream?

But then "No dream's worth waking"—Browning says:
And here's the reason why I tell thus much
I, now mature man, you anticipate,
May blame my Father justifiably

For letting me dream out my nonage thus,
And only by such slow and sure degrees
Permitting me to sift the grain from chaff,
Get truth and falsehood known and named as such.
Why did he ever let me dream at all,
Not bid me taste the story in its strength?
Suppose my childhood was scarce qualified
To rightly understand mythology,
Silence at least was in his power to keep:
I might have—somehow—correspondingly—
Well, who knows by what method, gained my gains,
Been taught, by forthrights not meanderings,
My aim should be to loathe, like Peleus' son,
A lie as Hell's Gate, love my wedded wife,
Like Hector, and so on with all the rest.
Could not I have excogitated this
Without believing such men really were?
That is—he might have put into my hand
The "Ethics"? In translation, if you please,
Exact, no pretty lying that improves,
To suit the modern taste: no more, no less—
The "Ethics": 'tis a treatise I find hard
To read aright now that my hair is grey,
And I can manage the original.
At five years old—how ill had fared its leaves!
Now, growing double o'er the Stagirite,
At least I soil no page with bread and milk,
Nor crumple, dogsear and deface—boys' way.

REPHAN.[1]

[The prose story referred to in the note is "How it Strikes a Stranger" in the Contributions of Q. Q. Probably no child has ever wholly forgotten this story if he or she had the good luck to read it in infancy. These Taylors lived at Ongar, not Norwich.]

How I lived, ere my human life began
In this world of yours,—like you, made man,—
When my home was the Star of my God Rephan?

Come then around me, close about,
World-weary earth-born ones! Darkest doubt
Or deepest despondency keeps you out?

Nowise! Before a word I speak,
Let my circle embrace your worn, your weak,
Brow-furrowed old age, youth's hollow cheek—

Diseased in the body, sick in soul,
Pinched poverty, satiate wealth,—your whole
Array of despairs! Have I read the roll?

All here? Attend, perpend! O Star
Of my God Rephan, what wonders are
In thy brilliance fugitive, faint and far!

Far from me, native to thy realm,
Who shared its perfections which o'erwhelm
Mind to conceive. Let drift the helm,

Let drive the sail, dare unconfined
Embark for the vastitude, O Mind,
Of an absolute bliss! Leave earth behind!

Here, by extremes, at a mean you guess:
There, all's at most—not more, not less:
Nowhere deficiency nor excess.

No want—whatever should be, is now:
No growth—that's change, and change comes—how
To royalty born with crown on brow?

Nothing begins—so needs to end:
Where fell it short at first? Extend
Only the same, no change can mend!

I use your language: mine—no word
Of its wealth would help who spoke, who heard,
To a gleam of intelligence. None preferred,

None felt distaste when better and worse
Were uncontrastable: bless or curse
What—in that uniform universe?

[1] Suggested by a very early recollection of a prose story by the noble woman and imaginative writer, Jane Taylor, of Norwich.—R. B.

Can your world's phrase, your sense of things
Forth-figure the Star of my God? No springs,
No winters throughout its space. Time brings

No hope, no fear: as to-day, shall be
To-morrow: advance or retreat need we
At our stand-still through eternity?

All happy: needs must we so have been,
Since who could be otherwise? All serene:
What dark was to banish, what light to screen?

Earth's rose is a bud that's checked or grows
As beams may encourage or blasts oppose:
Our lives leapt forth, each a full-orbed rose—

Each rose sole rose in a sphere that spread
Above and below and around—rose-red:
No fellowship, each for itself instead.

One better than I—would prove I lacked
Somewhat: one worse were a jarring fact
Disturbing my faultlessly exact.

How did it come to pass there lurked
Somehow a seed of change that worked
Obscure in my heart till perfection irked?—

Till out of its peace at length grew strife—
Hopes, fears, loves, hates,—obscurely rife,—
My life grown a-tremble to turn your life?

Was it Thou, above all lights that are,
Prime Potency, did Thy hand unbar
The prison-gate of Rephan my Star?

In me did such potency wake a pulse
Could trouble tranquillity that lulls
Not lashes inertion till throes convulse

Soul's quietude into discontent?
As when the completed rose bursts, rent
By ardors till forth from its orb are sent
New petals that mar—unmake the disc—
Spoil rondure: what in it ran brave risk,
Changed apathy's calm to strife, bright, brisk,

Pushed simple to compound, sprang and spread
Till, fresh-formed, facetted, floretted,
The flower that slept woke a star instead?

No mimic of Star Rephan! How long
I stagnated there where weak and strong,
The wise and the foolish, right and wrong,

Are merged alike in a neutral Best,
Can I tell? No more than at whose behest
The passion arose in my passive breast,

And I yearned for no sameness but difference
In thing and thing, that should shock my sense
With a want of worth in them all, and thence

Startle me up, by an Infinite
Discovered above and below me—height
And depth alike to attract my flight,

Repel my descent: by hate taught love.
Oh, gain were indeed to see above
Supremacy ever—to move, remove,

Not reach—aspire yet never attain
To the object aimed at! Scarce in vain,—
As each stage I left nor touched again.

To suffer, did pangs bring the loved one bliss,
Wring knowledge from ignorance,—just for this—
To add one drop to a love-abyss!

Enough: for you doubt, you hope, O men,
You fear, you agonize, die: what then?
Is an end to your life's work out of ken?

Have you no assurance that, earth at end,
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall
mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend?

Why should I speak? You divine the test.
When the trouble grew in my pregnant
breast
A voice said "So wouldst thou strive, not rest?

"Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,
Not rest content with a wealth that's dearth?
Thou art past Rephan, thy place be Earth!"

REVERIE.

I KNOW there shall dawn a day
—Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
That Power comes full in play?

Is it here, with grass about,
Under befriending trees,
When shy buds venture out,
And the air by mild degrees
Puts winter's death past doubt?

Is it up amid whirl and roar
Of the elemental flame
Which star-flecks heaven's dark floor,
That, new yet still the same,
Full in play comes Power once more?

Somewhere, below, above,
Shall a day dawn—this I know—
When Power, which vainly strove
My weakness to o'erthrow,
Shall triumph. I breathe, I move,

I truly am, at last!
For a veil is rent between
Me and the truth which passed
Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,
Grasped at—not gained, held fast.

I for my race and me
Shall apprehend life's law:
In the legend of man shall see
Writ large what small I saw
In my life's tale: both agree.

As the record from youth to age
Of my own, the single soul—
So the world's wide book: one page
Deciphered explains the whole
Of our common heritage.

How but from near to far
Should knowledge proceed, increase?
Try the clod ere test the star!
Bring our inside strife to peace
Ere we wage, on the outside, war!

So, my annals thus begin:
With body, to life awoke
Soul, the immortal twin
Of body which bore soul's yoke
Since mortal and not akin.

By means of the flesh, grown fit,
Mind, in surview of things,
Now soared, anon alit
To treasure its gatherings
From the ranged expanse—to-wit,

Nature,—earth's, heaven's wide show
Which taught all hope, all fear:
Acquainted with joy and woe,
I could say "Thus much is clear,
Doubt annulled thus much: I know.

"All is effect of cause:
As it would, has willed and done
Power: and my mind's applause
Goes, passing laws each one,
To Omnipotence, lord of laws."

Head praises, but heart refrains
From loving's acknowledgment.
Whole losses outweigh half-gains:
Earth's good is with evil blent:
Good struggles but evil reigns.

Yet since Earth's good proved good—
  Incontrovertibly
Worth loving—I understood
  How evil—did mind descry
Power's object to end pursued—

Were haply as cloud across
  Good's orb, no orb itself:
Mere mind—were it found at loss
  Did it play the tricksy elf
And from life's gold purge the dross?

Power is known infinite:
  Good struggles to be—at best
Seems—scanned by the human sight,
  Tried by the senses' test—
Good palpably: but with right

Therefore to mind's award
  Of loving, as power claims praise?
Power—which finds nought too hard,
  Fulfilling itself all ways
Unchecked, unchanged: while barred,

Baffled, what good began
  Ends evil on every side.
To Power submissive man
  Breathes "E'en as Thou art, abide!"
While to good "Late-found, long-sought,

"Would Power to a plenitude
  But liberate, but enlarge
Good's strait confine,—renewed
  Were ever the heart's discharge
Of loving!" Else doubts intrude.

For you dominate, stars all!
  For a sense informs you—brute,
Bird, worm, fly, great and small,
  Each with your attribute
Or low or majestical!

Thou earth that embosomest
  Offspring of land and sea—
How thy hills first sank to rest,
  How thy vales bred herb and tree
Which dizen thy mother-breast—

Do I ask? "Be ignorant
  Ever!" the answer clangs:
Whereas if I plead world's want,
  Soul's sorrows and body's pangs,
Play the human applicant,—

Is a remedy far to seek?
  I question and find response:
I—all men, strong or weak,
  Conceive and declare at once
For each want its cure. "Power, speak!

"Stop change, avert decay,
  Fix life fast, banish death,
Eclipse from the star bid stay,
  Abridge of no moment's breath
One creature! Hence, Night, hail, Day!"

What need to confess again
  No problem this to solve
By impotence? Power, once plain
  Proved Power,—let on Power devolve
Good's right to co-equal reign!

Past mind's conception—Power!
  Do I seek how star, earth, beast,
Bird, worm, fly, gained their dower
  For life's use, most and least?
Back from the search I cower.

Do I seek what heals all harm,
  Nay, hinders the harm at first,
Saves earth? Speak, Power, the charm!
  Keep the life there unamerced
By chance, change, death's alarm!

As promptly as mind conceives,
  Let Power in its turn declare
Some law which wrong retrieves,
  Abolishes everywhere
What thwarts, what irks, what grieves!

Never to be! and yet
  How easy it seems—to sense
Like man's—if somehow met
  Power with its match—immense
Love, limitless, unbeset

By hindrance on every side!
Conjectured, nowise known,
Such may be: could man confide
Such would match—were Love but shown
Stript of the veils that hide—

Power's self now manifest!
So reads my record: thine,
O world, how runs it? Guessed
Were the purport of that prime line,
Prophetic of all the rest!

"In a beginning God
Made heaven and earth." Forth flashed
Knowledge: from star to clod
Man knew things: doubt abashed
Closed its long period.

Knowledge obtained Power praise.
Had Good been manifest,
Broke out in cloudless blaze,
Unchequered as unrepressed,
In all things Good at best—

Then praise—all praise, no blame—
Had hailed the perfection. No!
As Power's display, the same
Be Good's—praise forth shall flow
Unisonous in acclaim!

Even as the world its life,
So have I lived my own—
Power seen with Love at strife,
That sure, this dimly shown,
—Good rare and evil rife.

Whereof the effect be—faith
That, some far day, were found
Ripeness in things now rathe,[1]
Wrong righted, each chain unbound,
Renewal born out of scathe.[2]

Why faith—but to lift the load,
To leaven the lump, where lies
Mind prostrate through knowledge owed
To the loveless Power it tries
To withstand, how vain! In flowed

Ever resistless fact:
No more than the passive clay
Disputes the potter's act,
Could the whelmed mind disobey
Knowledge the cataract.

But, perfect in every part,
Has the potter's moulded shape,
Leap of man's quickened heart,
Throe of his thought's escape,
Stings of his soul which dart

Through the barrier of flesh, till keen
She climbs from the calm and clear,
Through turbidity all between,
From the known to the unknown here,
Heaven's "Shall be," from Earth's "Has been"?

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love—transports, transforms
Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'.

I have faith such end shall be:
From the first, Power was—I knew.
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

[1] Early. [2] Harm.

EPILOGUE.

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
—Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

OF

ROBERT BROWNING'S POEMS AND PLAYS.

1833. PAULINE: A Fragment of a Confession.

1835. PARACELSUS.

1837. STRAFFORD: An Historical Tragedy.

1840. SORDELLO.

1841. Bells and Pomegranatês, No. I., PIPPA PASSES.

1842. Bells and Pomegranates, No. II., KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES.

1842. Bells and Pomegranates, No. III., DRAMATIC LYRICS.

- Cavalier Tunes—
  - I. Marching Along.
  - II. Give a Rouse.
  - III. My Wife Gertrude.[1]
- Italy and France—
  - I. Italy.[2]
  - II. France.[3]
- Camp and Cloister—
  - I. Camp (French).[4]
  - II. Cloister (Spanish).[5]
- In a Gondola.
- Artemis Prologuizes.
- Waring.
- Queen Worship—
  - I. Rudel and the Lady of Tripoli.
  - II. Cristina.

DRAMATIC LYRICS—*Continued.*

- Madhouse Cells—
  - I. [Johannes Agricola.[6]]
  - II. [Porphyria.[7]]
- Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr, 1842.
- The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

1843. Bells and Pomegranates, No. IV., THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES: A Tragedy in Five Acts.

1843. Bells and Pomegranates, No. V., A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON: A Tragedy in Three Acts.

1844. Bells and Pomegranates, No. VI., COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY: A Play in Five Acts.

1845. Bells and Pomegranates, VII., DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS—

- How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.
- Pictor Ignotus. Florence, 15—.
- Italy in England.[8]
- England in Italy.[9]
- The Lost Leader.
- The Lost Mistress.

[1] Afterwards called "Boot and Saddle."
[2] Afterwards called "My Last Duchess."
[3] Afterwards called "Count Gismond."
[4] Afterwards called "Incident of the French Camp."
[5] Afterwards called "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister."

[6] Afterwards called "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," was first printed in *The Monthly Repository*, vol. x. N.S. 1836, pp. 45, 46.
[7] Afterwards called "Porphyria's Lover," was first printed in *The Monthly Repository*, vol. x. N.S. 1836, pp. 43, 44.
[8] Afterwards called "The Italian in England."
[9] Afterwards called "The Englishman in Italy."

DRAMATIC ROMANCES—*Contd.*

Home Thoughts from Abroad (I. "Oh to be in England." II. "Here's to Nelson's Memory."[1] III. "Nobly Cape St. Vincent."[2])
The Tomb at St. Praxed's.[3]
Garden Fancies—
I. The Flower's Name.[4]
II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis.[5]
France and Spain—
I. The Laboratory (Ancien Régime).[6]
II. The Confessional.
The Flight of the Duchess.[7]
Earth's Immortalities.
Song, "Nay but you, who do not love her."
The Boy and the Angel.[8]
Night and Morning (I. Night,[9] II. Morning).[10]
Claret and Tokay.[11]
Saul.[12]
Time's Revenges.
The Glove.

1846. Bells and Pomegranates, No. VIII. and last. LURIA; and A SOUL'S TRAGEDY.

1850. CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

[1] Afterwards printed as the third section of "Nationality in Drinks."
[2] Afterwards called "Home Thoughts from the Sea."
[3] Afterwards called "The Bishop orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church," was first printed in *Hood's Magazine*, vol. iii. March 1845, pp. 237–239.
[4,5] First printed in *Hood's Magazine*, vol. ii. July 1844, pp. 45–48.
[6] First printed in *Hood's Magazine*, vol. i. June 1844, pp. 513, 514.
[7] Sections 1 to 9, first printed in *Hood's Magazine*, vol. iii. April 1845, pp. 313–318.
[8] First printed in *Hood's Magazine*, vol. ii. August 1844, pp. 140–142.
[9] Afterwards called "Meeting at Night."
[10] Afterwards called "Parting at Morning."
[11] Afterwards printed as the first and second sections of "Nationality in Drinks."
[12] First part only (sections 1–9); the second part was added and included with it in "Men and Women," 1855, vol. ii. p. 111.

1855. MEN AND WOMEN. In Two Volumes—

Vol. I. Love among the Ruins.
A Lovers' Quarrel.
Evelyn Hope.
Up at a Villa—Down in the City. (As Distinguished by an Italian Person of Quality.)
A Woman's Last Word.
Fra Lippo Lippi.
A Toccata of Gallupi's.
By the Fireside.
Any Wife to Any Husband.
An Epistle containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician.
Mesmerism.
A Serenade at the Villa.
My Star.
Instans Tyrannus.
A Pretty Woman.
"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."
Respectability.
A Light Woman.
The Statue and the Bust.
Love in a Life.
Life in a Love.
How it Strikes a Contemporary.
The Last Ride Together.
The Patriot: An Old Story.
Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.
Bishop Blougram's Apology.
Memorabilia.

Vol. II. Andrea del Sarto (called "The Faultless Painter.")
Before.
After.
In Three Days.
In a Year.
Old Pictures in Florence.
In a Balcony.
Saul. (See *note* [12].)
"De Gustibus —"
Women and Roses.
Protus.
Holy-Cross Day.
The Guardian Angel: A Picture at Fano.

MEN AND WOMEN—*Continued.*
- Cleon.
- The Twins.[1]
- Popularity.
- The Heretic's Tragedy. A Middle-Age Interlude.
- Two in the Campagna.
- A Grammarian's Funeral.
- One Way of Love.
- Another Way of Love.
- "Transcendentalism:" A Poem in Twelve Books.
- Misconceptions.
- One Word More. To E. B. B.

1864. DRAMATIS PERSONÆ—
- James Lee.
- Gold Hair: A Legend of Pornic.[2]
- The Worst of It.
- Dîs aliter visum; or Le Byron de nos Jours.
- Too Late.
- Abt Vogler.
- Rabbi Ben Ezra.
- A Death in the Desert.
- Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island.
- Confessions.
- May and Death.[3]
- Prospice.[4]
- Youth and Art.
- A Face.
- A Likeness.
- Mr. Sludge, "The Medium."
- Apparent Failure.
- Epilogue.

1864. Orpheus and Eurydice. F. Leighton.[5]

1868. Deaf and Dumb.[6]

[1] First printed in a pamphlet entitled "Two Poems. By Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning." 8vo. London, 1854.

[2] First printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. xiii., May 1864, p. 596.

[3] First printed in *The Keepsake* for 1857.

[4] First printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. xiii., June 1864, p. 694.

[5] First printed in the Catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition 1864, afterwards called "Eurydice to Orpheus."

[6] First printed in "The Poetical Works of Robert Browning," six vols. 1868; vol. vi. p. 151.

1868–9. THE RING AND THE BOOK. In Four Volumes.

1871. BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE, including a Transcript from Euripides.

1871. PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU, SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

1872. FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

1873. RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY, OR TURF AND TOWERS.

1875. ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY, including a Transcript from Euripides, being the Last Adventure of Balaustion.

1875. THE INN ALBUM.

1876. PACCHIAROTTO AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER: with other Poems—
- Prologue.
- Of Pacchiarotto and how he worked in Distemper.
- At the "Mermaid."
- House.
- Shop.
- Pisgah Sights. I.
- ,, ,, II.
- Fears and Scruples.
- Natural Magic.
- Magical Nature.
- Bifurcation.
- Numpholeptos.
- Appearances.
- St. Martin's Summer.
- Hervé Riel.[6]
- A Forgiveness.
- Cenciaja.
- Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial.
- Epilogue.

1877. THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

1878. LA SAISIAZ.[7]

1878. THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.[8]

[6] First printed in *The Cornhill Magazine*, March 1871.

[7, 8] Published together in one volume.

1879. DRAMATIC IDYLS—
Martin Ralph.
Pheidippides.
Halbert and Hob.
Ivàn Ivànovitch.
Tray.
Ned Bratts.

1880. DRAMATIC IDYLS: SECOND SERIES—
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Echetlos.
Clive.
Muléykeh.
Pietro of Abano.
Doctor ——.
Pan and Luna.
[Epilogue.]

1883. JOCOSERIA—
Wanting is—What?
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Solomon and Balkis.
Cristina and Monaldeschi.
Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli—
Adam, Lilith, and Eve.
Ixion.
Jochanan Hakkadosh.
Never the Time and the Place.
Pambo.

1884. FERISHTAH'S FANCIES—
Prologue.
1. The Eagle.
2. Melon-Seller.
3. Shah Abbas.
4. The Family.
5. The Sun.
6. Mihrab Shah.
7. A Camel-Driver.
8. Two Camels.
9. Cherries.
10. Plot-Culture.
11. A Pillar at Sebzevah.
12. A Bean-Stripe: also Apple-Eating.
Epilogue.

1887. PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY. To wit: Bernard de Mandeville, Daniel Bartoli, Christopher Smart, George Bubb Dodington, Francis Furini, Gerard de Lairesse, and Charles Avison. Introduced by a Dialogue between Apollo and the Fates; concluded by another between John Fust and his Friends.

1889.[1] ASOLANDO: FANCIES AND FACTS—
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Humility.
Poetics.
Summum Bonum.
A Pearl, A Girl.
Speculative.
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The Pope and the Net.
The Bean-Feast.
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[1] Published on December 12th, 1889, the day of Mr. Browning's death.

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